STAR WARS®

OMNIBUS

A LONG TIME AGO. . .

VOLUME TWO

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DARK HORSE BOOKS®

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Star Wars® Omnibus: A Long Time Ago. . . . Volume Two
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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE
ADVENTURES BEYOND THE GREATEST SPACE-FANTASY FILM OF ALL!
STAR WARS
KEEP BLASTIN', CHEWIE! THOSE THINGS WILL EAT THROUGH THE FALCON FOR DINNER--
--AND US FOR DESSERT!
INFANTINO/ WILCOX
CAVERN OF THE CRAWLING DEATH!

Long ago in a galaxy far, far away. . .there exists a state of cosmic *civil war*. A brave alliance of *underground freedom fighters* has challenged the tyranny and oppression of the awesome *Galactic Empire*. This is their story!

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CONTINUING THE SAGA BEGUN IN THE FILM BY GEORGE LUCAS RELEASED BY TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

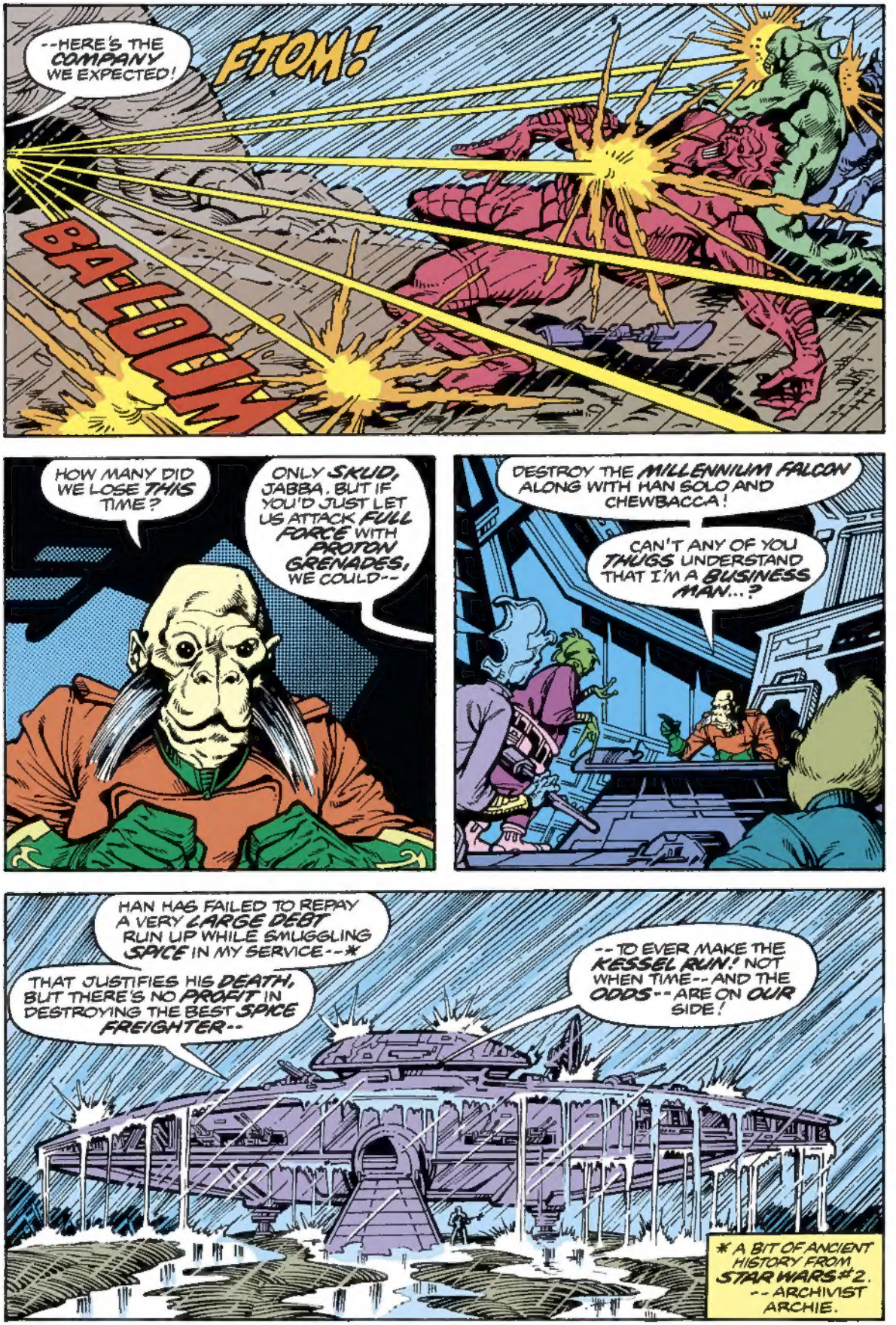
ARCHIE GOODWIN WRITER/EDITOR • CARMINE INFANTINO & GENE DAY ARTISTS • JOHN COSTANZA LETTERER • GLYNIS WEIN COLORIST • JIM SHOOTER CONSULTING EDITOR

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO JABBA THE HUT?

I TAKE IT YOU AND YOUR HIRED CLOWNS ARE *REJECTING* OUR LATEST OFFER, JABBA--

ANSWER: HE IS ALIVE AND WELL AND TRYING TO KILL *HAN SOLO* ON AN OBSCURE PLANET CALLED *ORLEON.*

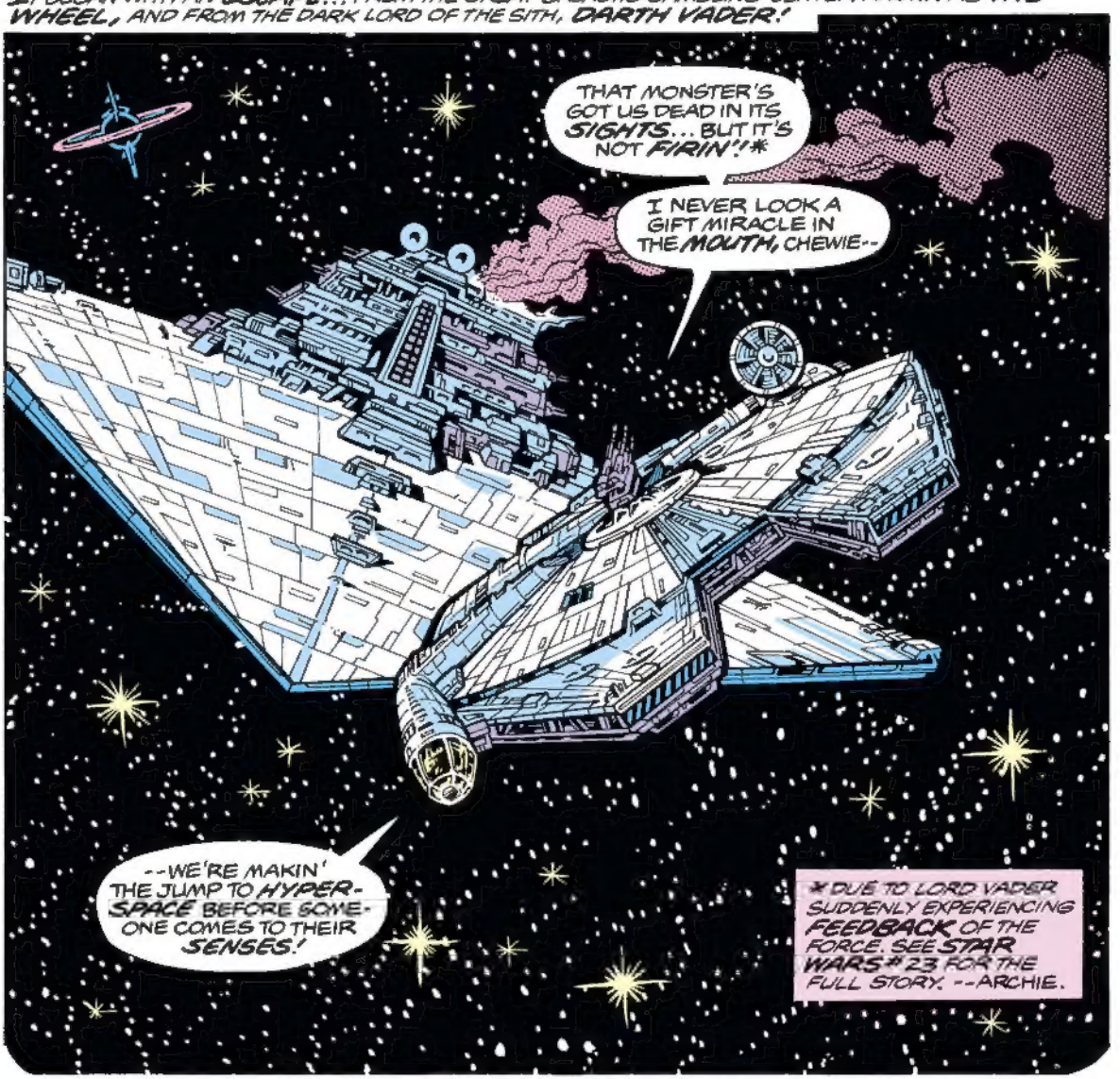
--NEXT TIME JUST A SIMPLE 'NO' WILL DO!
VA-WUM
A WEEK IN THE RAIN HASN'T DONE A THING FOR JABBA'S DISPOSITION.
WAIT'LL HE FINDS OUT THIS IS ORLEON'S DRY SEASON!
FORGET THE REPAIRS AND GRAB YOUR BLASTER, CHEWIE! NEGOTIATIONS JUST BROKE DOWN AGAIN!
BORRWK!
YOU'RE GETTING TIRED OF THIS--?
THINK OF THE WAY I FEEL! THE BLASTED CAVE HAS SPRUNG A LOT OF LEAKS SINCE WE LAST USED IT AS A HIDE-OUT--
AND DO YOU KNOW HOW BAD WET WOOKIEE FUR SMELLS?
ABOUT HALF AS BAD AS WET HUMAN HAIR AND CLOTHING...?
OAAARRRK!
WELL, MAYBE I DID SPEAK OUT OF TURN. LIVING IN THIS ROCKPILE HASN'T DONE MUCH FOR MY NERVES.
BUT RIGHT NOW--

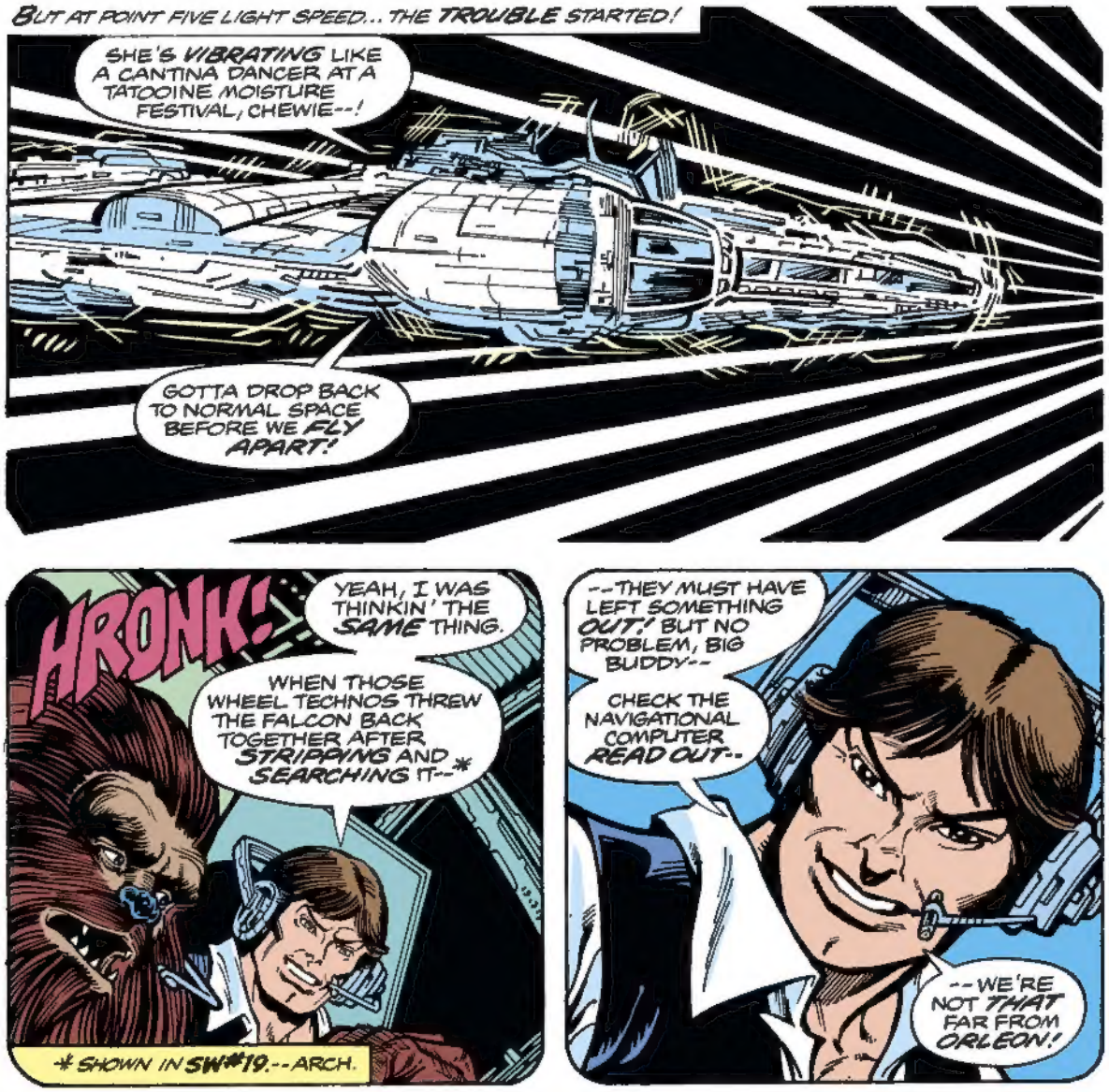

--HERE'S THE COMPANY WE EXPECTED!
FTOM!
BA-LOUM
HOW MANY DID WE LOSE THIS TIME?
ONLY SKUD, JABBA. BUT IF YOU'D JUST LET US ATTACK FULL FORCE WITH PROTON GRENADES, WE COULD--
DESTROY THE MILLENNIUM FALCON ALONG WITH HAN SOLO AND CHEWBACCA!
CAN'T ANY OF YOU THUGS UNDERSTAND THAT I'M A BUSINESS MAN...?
HAN HAS FAILED TO REPAY A VERY LARGE DEBT RUN UP WHILE SMUGGLING SPICE IN MY SERVICE--*
THAT JUSTIFIES HIS DEATH, BUT THERE'S NO PROFIT IN DESTROYING THE BEST SPICE FREIGHTER--
--TO EVER MAKE THE KESSEL RUN! NOT WHEN TIME--AND THE ODDS--ARE ON OUR SIDE!
* A BIT OF ANCIENT HISTORY FROM STAR WARS #2. --ARCHIVIST ARCHIE.

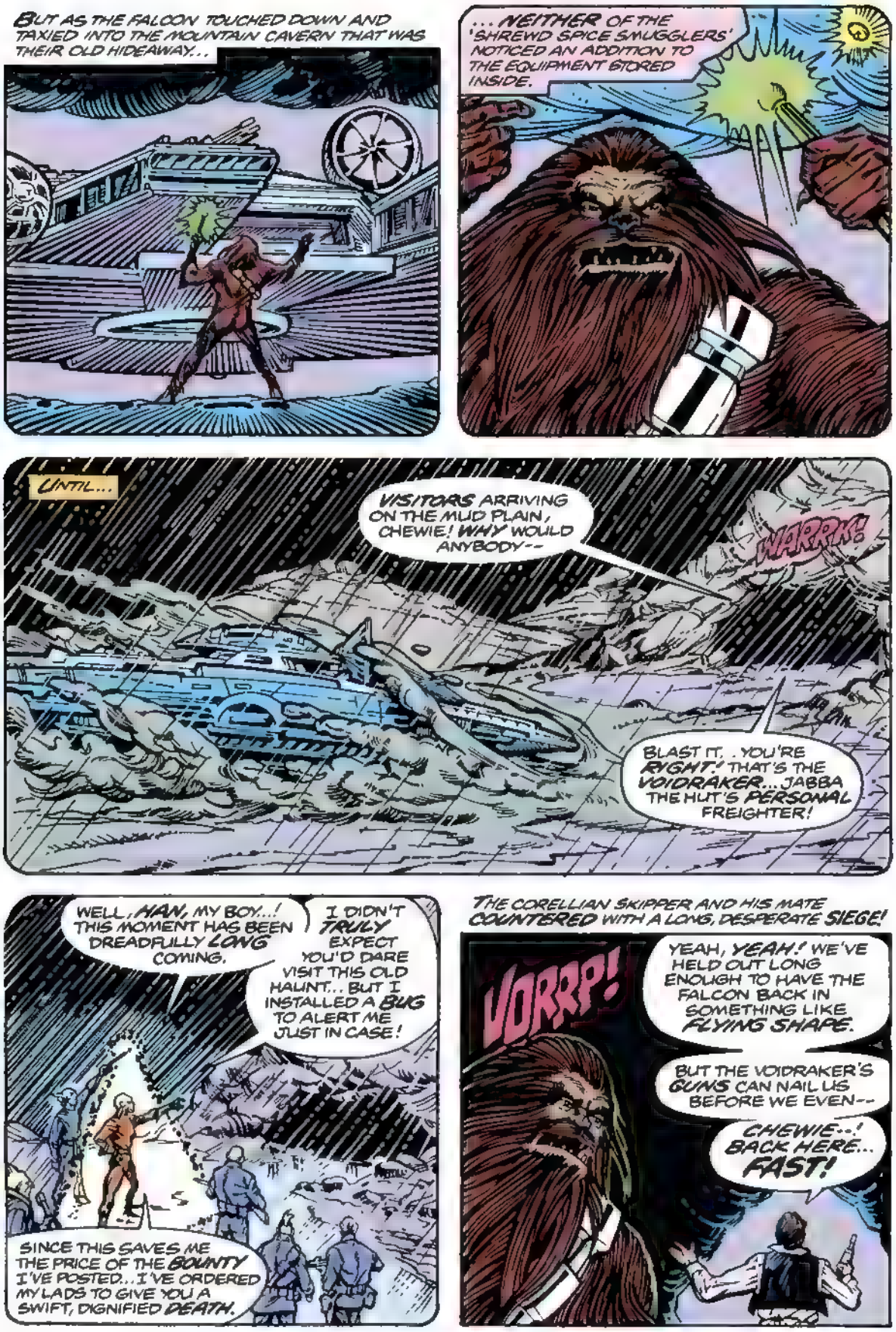
NUTRIENT PASTE--! FOR A MAN USED TO PRIME SAND LIZARD STEAK AND FIVE YEAR OLD SPICE WINE!
IF WE'RE DOWN TO THIS STUFF... OUR SITUATION'S WORSE THAN I THOUGHT!

BLAST IT! A FEW MORE ROTATIONS OF THIS MUD BALL AND WE'LL BE BEGGING JABBA TO BLAST US SO WE DON'T HAVE TO STARVE!
HOW'D I MANAGE TO GET US INTO SUCH A DUMB SPOT...?!

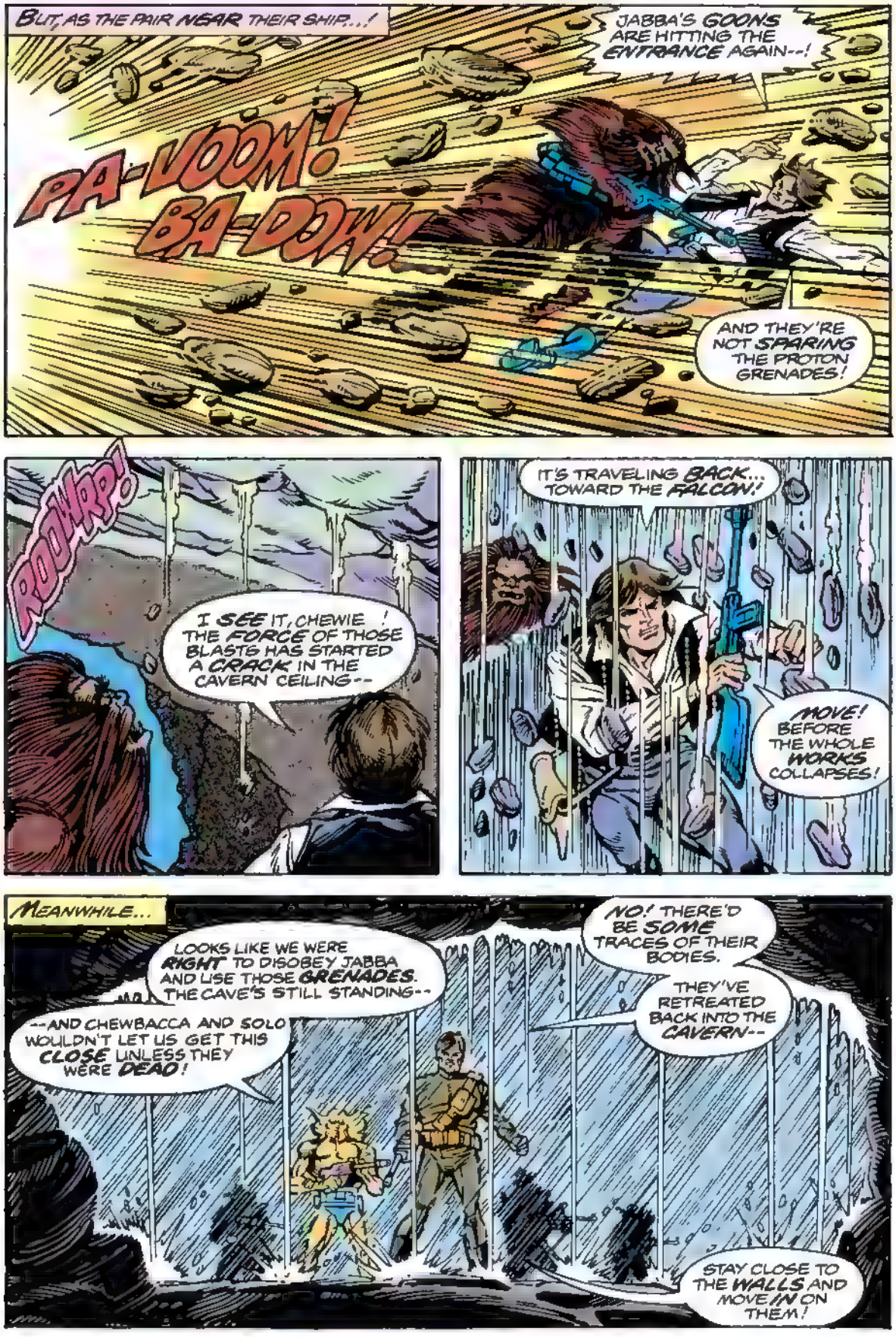
IT BEGAN WITH AN **ESCAPE**... FROM THE GREAT GALACTIC GAMBLING CENTER KNOWN AS **THE WHEEL**, AND FROM THE DARK LORD OF THE SITH, **DARTH VADER**!

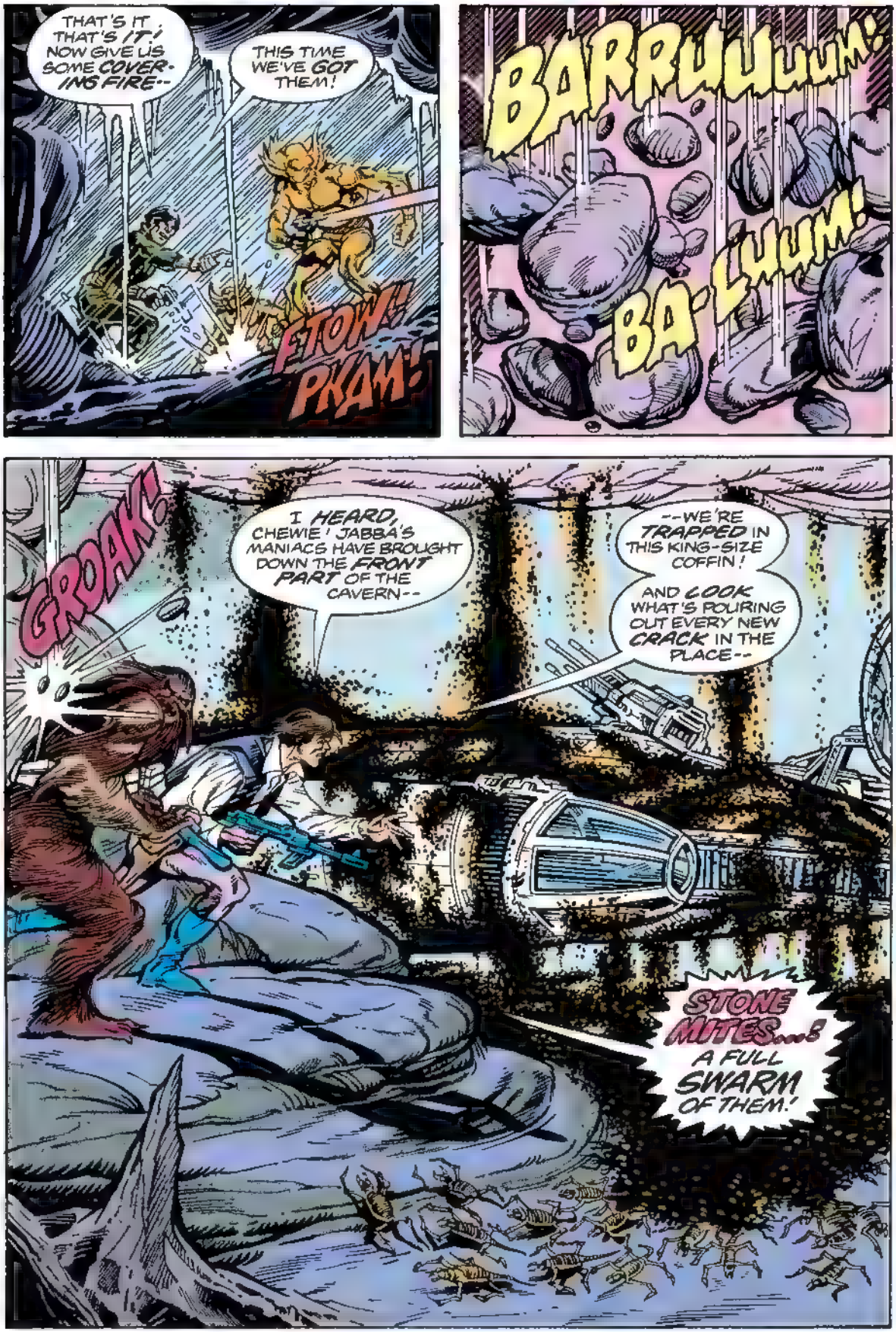

THAT MONSTER'S GOT US DEAD IN ITS SIGHTS... BUT IT'S NOT FIRIN'!*
I NEVER LOOK A GIFT MIRACLE IN THE MOUTH, CHEWIE--
--WE'RE MAKIN' THE JUMP TO HYPER-SPACE BEFORE SOME-ONE COMES TO THEIR SENSES!
*DUE TO LORD VADER SUDDENLY EXPERIENCING FEEDBACK OF THE FORCE. SEE STAR WARS #23 FOR THE FULL STORY. --ARCHIE.

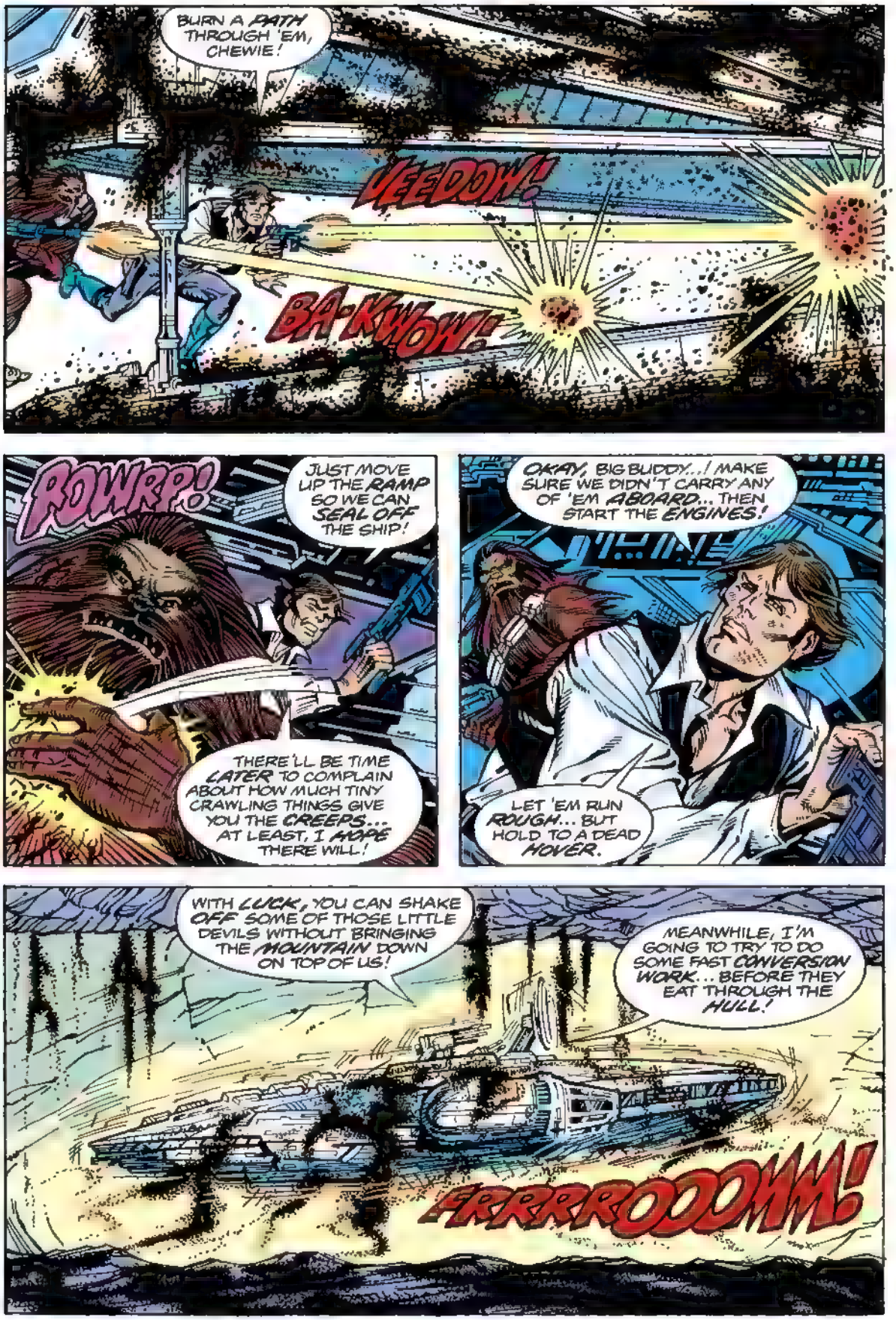

BUT AT POINT FIVE LIGHT SPEED.. THE TROUBLE STARTED!
SHE'S VIBRATING LIKE A CANTINA DANCER AT A TATOOINE MOISTURE FESTIVAL, CHEWIE--!
GOTTA DROP BACK TO NORMAL SPACE BEFORE WE FLY APART!
HRONK!
YEAH, I WAS THINKIN' THE SAME THING.
WHEN THOSE WHEEL TECHNOS THREW THE FALCON BACK TOGETHER AFTER STRIPPING AND * SEARCHING IT--
* SHOWN IN SW#19.--ARCH.
--THEY MUST HAVE LEFT SOMETHING OUT.' BUT NO PROBLEM, BIG BUDDY--
CHECK THE NAVIGATIONAL COMPUTER READ OUT--
--WE'RE NOT THAT FAR FROM ORLEON!
AND BY A CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED SERIES OF SHORT HOPS IN AND OUT OF WARP, THE AILING SPICE FREIGHTER IS COAXED TO ITS DESTINATION...
AH! JUST AS MISERABLE AND UNINVITING AS EVER! ONE OF THE FEW PLACES IN THE MID-SYSTEMS NO ONE CAN STAND--
--WHICH MAKES IT THE PERFECT PLACE FOR A COUPLE OF SHREWD SPICE SMUGGLERS TO HAVE AN EMERGENCY STATION, EH, CHEWIE?

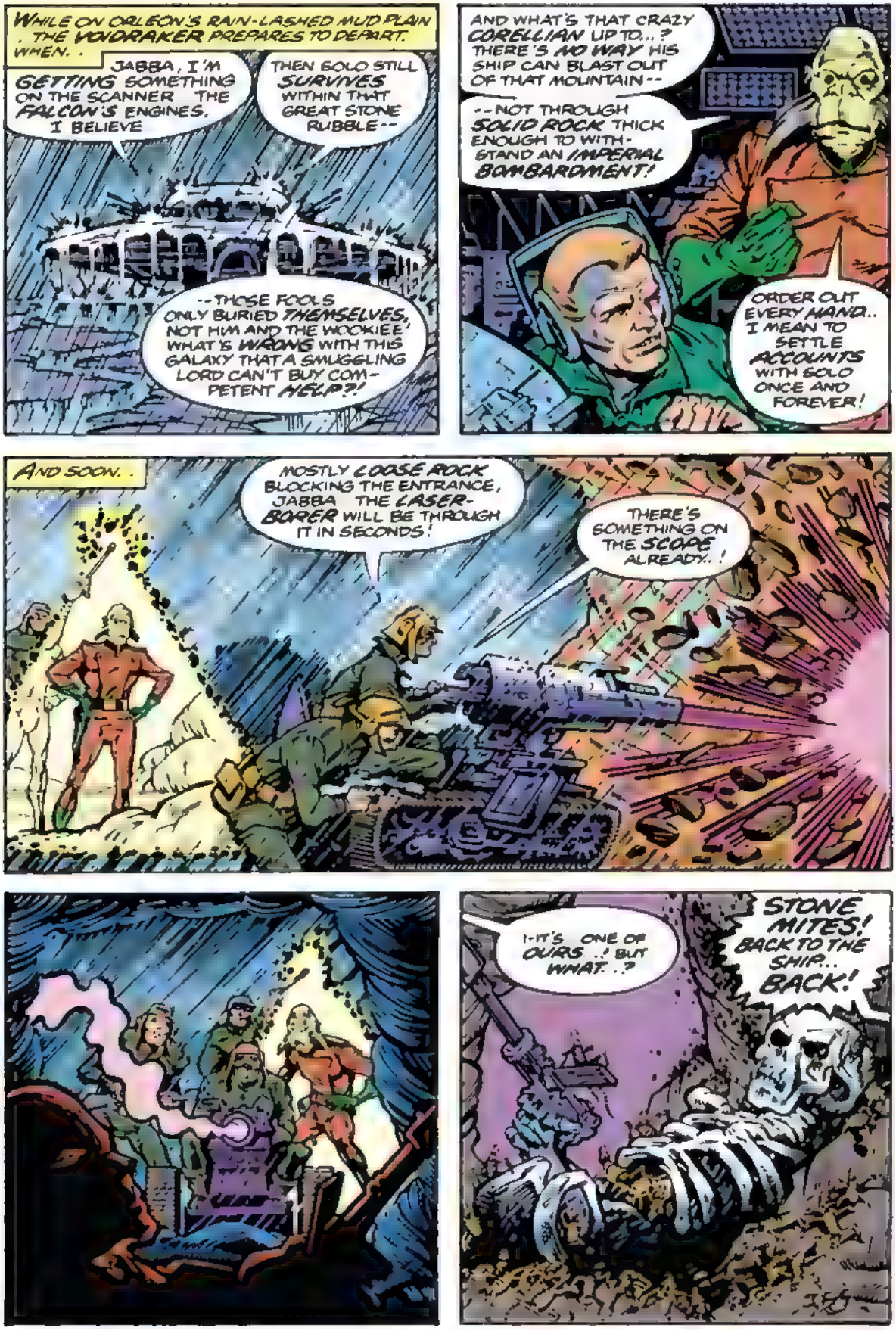

BUT AS THE FALCON TOUCHED DOWN AND TAXIED INTO THE MOUNTAIN CAVERN THAT WAS THEIR OLD HIDEAWAY...
...NEITHER OF THE 'SHREWD SPICE SMUGGLERS' NOTICED AN ADDITION TO THE EQUIPMENT STORED INSIDE.
UNTIL...
VISITORS ARRIVING ON THE MUD PLAIN, CHEWIE! WHY WOULD ANYBODY--
WARRK!
BLAST IT, . YOU'RE RIGHT! THAT'S THE VOIDRAKER... JABBA THE HUT'S PERSONAL FREIGHTER!
WELL, HAN, MY BOY...! THIS MOMENT HAS BEEN DREADFULLY LONG COMING.
I DIDN'T TRULY EXPECT YOU'D DARE VISIT THIS OLD HAUNT.. BUT I INSTALLED A BUG TO ALERT ME JUST IN CASE!
SINCE THIS SAVES ME THE PRICE OF THE BOUNTY I'VE POSTED.. I'VE ORDERED MY LADS TO GIVE YOU A SWIFT, DIGNIFIED DEATH.
THE CORELLIAN SKIPPER AND HIS MATE COUNTERED WITH A LONG, DESPERATE SIEGE!
VORRP!
YEAH, YEAH! WE'VE HELD OUT LONG ENOUGH TO HAVE THE FALCON BACK IN SOMETHING LIKE FLYING SHAPE.
BUT THE VOIDRAKER'S GUNS CAN NAIL US BEFORE WE EVEN--
CHEWIE--! BACK HERE... FAST!

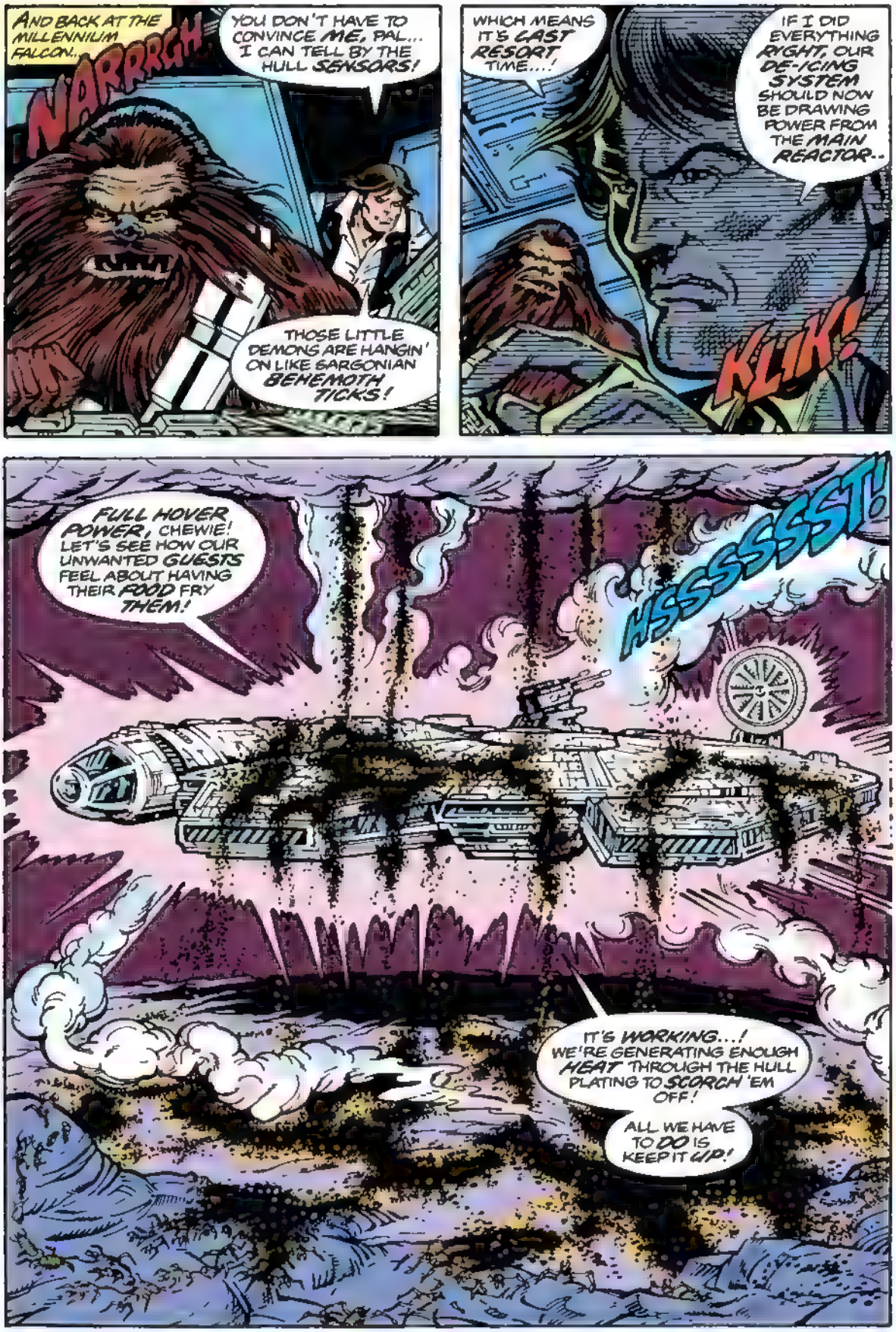
FTOOM!
FTOOM!
WOW!
WURGUUH!
NO, I HAVEN'T GONE CAVE HAPPY.
BUT IT'D BE BETTER IF I WERE IMAGINING THINGS!
I SPOTTED THIS CRAWLING ON THAT FOOD TIN I THREW AWAY EARLIER, PAL--
--IT'S A STONE MITE! THEY'RE THE ULTIMATE SCAVENGERS!
AN OLD TIMER TOLD ME ABOUT 'EM... THEY'RE A BIOLOGICAL WEAPON DEVELOPED DURING THE CLONE WARS
THEIR BODIES MANUFACTURE AN ACID THAT ENABLES 'EM TO EAT THROUGH ANYTHING!
LOOK WHAT THIS ONE DID TO THAT TIN--
--AND THEY USUALLY MOVE IN SWARMS! THOUSANDS, MAYBE MILLIONS... SPECIALLY CREATED TO DEVOUR A PLANET'S MINERAL RESOURCES.
THEY MOSTLY TRAVEL THROUGH SHEER ROCK... FEEDING ON ANY VEINS OF ORE!
NARRL!
RIGHT! THAT SCARES ME, TOO! IF OUR OLD HIDEOUT HAS SUDDENLY SPRUNG SOME LEAKS... IT MIGHT JUST BE INFESTED WITH THOSE LITTLE MONSTERS!
GET TO THE FALCON...! BEFORE IT BECOMES A MAIN COURSE... AND YOU AN' ME THE DESSERT!

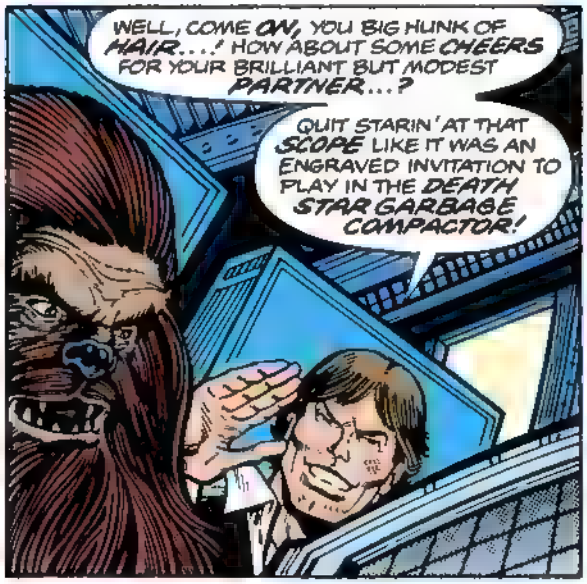

BUT, AS THE PAIR NEAR THEIR SHIP...!
JABBA'S GOONS ARE HITTING THE ENTRANCE AGAIN--!
PA-VOOM! BA-DOW!
AND THEY'RE NOT SPARING THE PROTON GRENADES!
ROOWRP!
I SEE IT, CHEWIE! THE FORCE OF THOSE BLASTS HAS STARTED A CRACK IN THE CAVERN CEILING--
IT'S TRAVELING BACK... TOWARD THE FALCON!
MOVE! BEFORE THE WHOLE WORKS COLLAPSES!
MEANWHILE...
LOOKS LIKE WE WERE RIGHT TO DISOBEY JABBA AND USE THOSE GRENADES. THE CAVE'S STILL STANDING--
--AND CHEWBACCA AND SOLO WOULDN'T LET US GET THIS CLOSE UNLESS THEY WERE DEAD!
NO! THERE'D BE SOME TRACES OF THEIR BODIES.
THEY'VE RETREATED BACK INTO THE CAVERN--
STAY CLOSE TO THE WALLS AND MOVE IN ON THEM!


THAT'S IT, THAT'S IT! NOW GIVE US SOME COVERING FIRE--
THIS TIME WE'VE GOT THEM!
FTOW! PKAM!
BARRUUUUM!
BA-LUUM!
GROAK!
I HEARD, CHEWIE! JABBA'S MANIACS HAVE BROUGHT DOWN THE FRONT PART OF THE CAVERN--
--WE'RE TRAPPED IN THIS KING-SIZE COFFIN!
AND LOOK WHAT'S POURING OUT EVERY NEW CRACK IN THE PLACE--
STONE MITES...& A FULL SWARM OF THEM!


BURN A PATH THROUGH 'EM, CHEWIE!
VEEDOW!
BA-KWOW!
ROWRP!
JUST MOVE UP THE RAMP SO WE CAN SEAL OFF THE SHIP!
THERE'LL BE TIME LATER TO COMPLAIN ABOUT HOW MUCH TINY CRAWLING THINGS GIVE YOU THE CREEPS... AT LEAST, I HOPE THERE WILL!
OKAY, BIG BUDDY... I MAKE SURE WE DIDN'T CARRY ANY OF 'EM ABOARD... THEN START THE ENGINES!
LET 'EM RUN ROUGH... BUT HOLD TO A DEAD HOVER.
WITH LUCK, YOU CAN SHAKE OFF SOME OF THOSE LITTLE DEVILS WITHOUT BRINGING THE MOUNTAIN DOWN ON TOP OF US!
MEANWHILE, I'M GOING TO TRY TO DO SOME FAST CONVERSION WORK... BEFORE THEY EAT THROUGH THE HULL!
RRRROOOHH!


WHILE ON ORLEON'S RAIN-LASHED MUD PLAIN . THE VOIDRAKER PREPARES TO DEPART. WHEN. .
JABBA, I'M GETTING SOMETHING ON THE SCANNER THE FALCON'S ENGINES, I BELIEVE
THEN SOLO STILL SURVIVES WITHIN THAT GREAT STONE RUBBLE--
--THOSE FOOLS ONLY BURIED THEMSELVES, NOT HIM AND THE WOOKIEE, WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS GALAXY THAT A SMUGGLING LORD CAN'T BUY COMPETENT HELP?!
AND WHAT'S THAT CRAZY CORELLIAN UP TO..? THERE'S NO WAY HIS SHIP CAN BLAST OUT OF THAT MOUNTAIN--
--NOT THROUGH SOLID ROCK THICK ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND AN IMPERIAL BOMBARDMENT!
ORDER OUT EVERY HAND.. I MEAN TO SETTLE ACCOUNTS WITH SOLO ONCE AND FOREVER!
AND SOON. .
MOSTLY LOOSE ROCK BLOCKING THE ENTRANCE, JABBA THE LASER-BORER WILL BE THROUGH IT IN SECONDS!
THERE'S SOMETHING ON THE SCOPE ALREADY. !
I-IT'S ONE OF OURS .! BUT WHAT. .?
STONE MITES! BACK TO THE SHIP.. BACK!

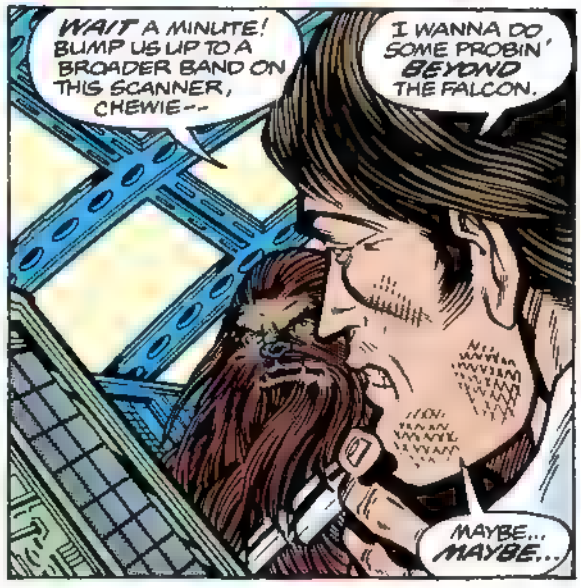

AND BACK AT THE MILLENNIUM FALCON...
NARRRGH
YOU DON'T HAVE TO CONVINCE ME, PAL... I CAN TELL BY THE HULL SENSORS!
THOSE LITTLE DEMONS ARE HANGIN' ON LIKE SARGONIAN BEHEMOTH TICKS!
WHICH MEANS IT'S LAST RESORT TIME....!
IF I DID EVERYTHING RIGHT, OUR DE-ICING SYSTEM SHOULD NOW BE DRAWING POWER FROM THE MAIN REACTOR..
KLIK!
FULL HOVER POWER, CHEWIE! LET'S SEE HOW OUR UNWANTED GUESTS FEEL ABOUT HAVING THEIR FOOD FRY THEM!
HSSSSSST!
IT'S WORKING...! WE'RE GENERATING ENOUGH HEAT THROUGH THE HULL PLATING TO SCORCH 'EM OFF!
ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS KEEP IT UP!

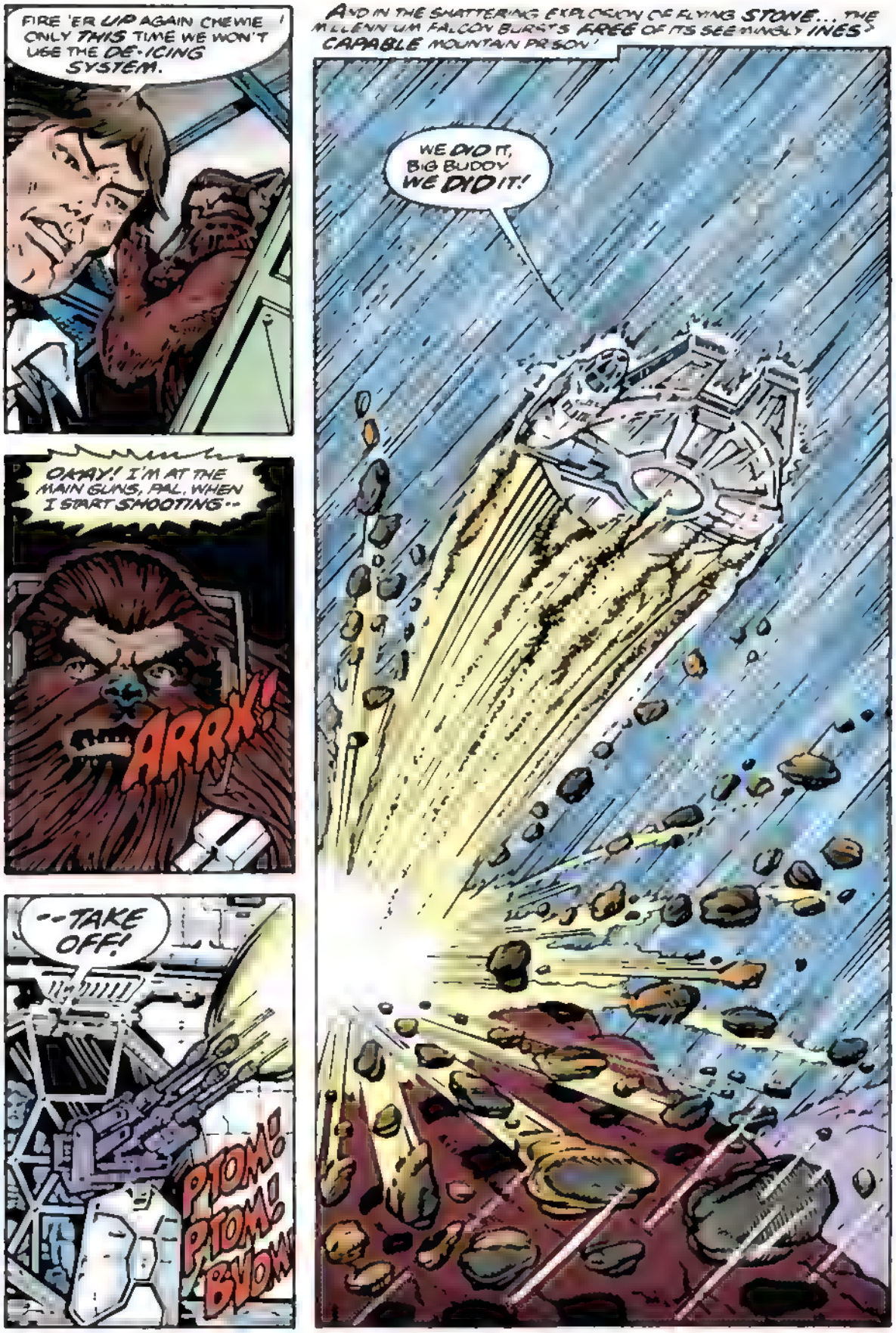

WELL, COME ON, YOU BIG HUNK OF HAIR...! HOW ABOUT SOME CHEERS FOR YOUR BRILLIANT BUT MODEST PARTNER...?
QUIT STARIN' AT THAT SCOPE LIKE IT WAS AN ENGRAVED INVITATION TO PLAY IN THE DEATH STAR GARBAGE COMPACTOR!

HEY! LEMME SEE THAT! W-WHAT...? THE ENTIRE MOUNTAIN MUST BE HONEY-COMBED BY THOSE MISERABLE, EVER-MULTIPLYIN' 'STONE MITES! THEY'RE DROPPING ON US FASTER THAN WE'RE BURNIN' 'EM OFF!
MORE POWER, CHEWIE...! WE GOTTA FEED THE DE-ICERS MORE--

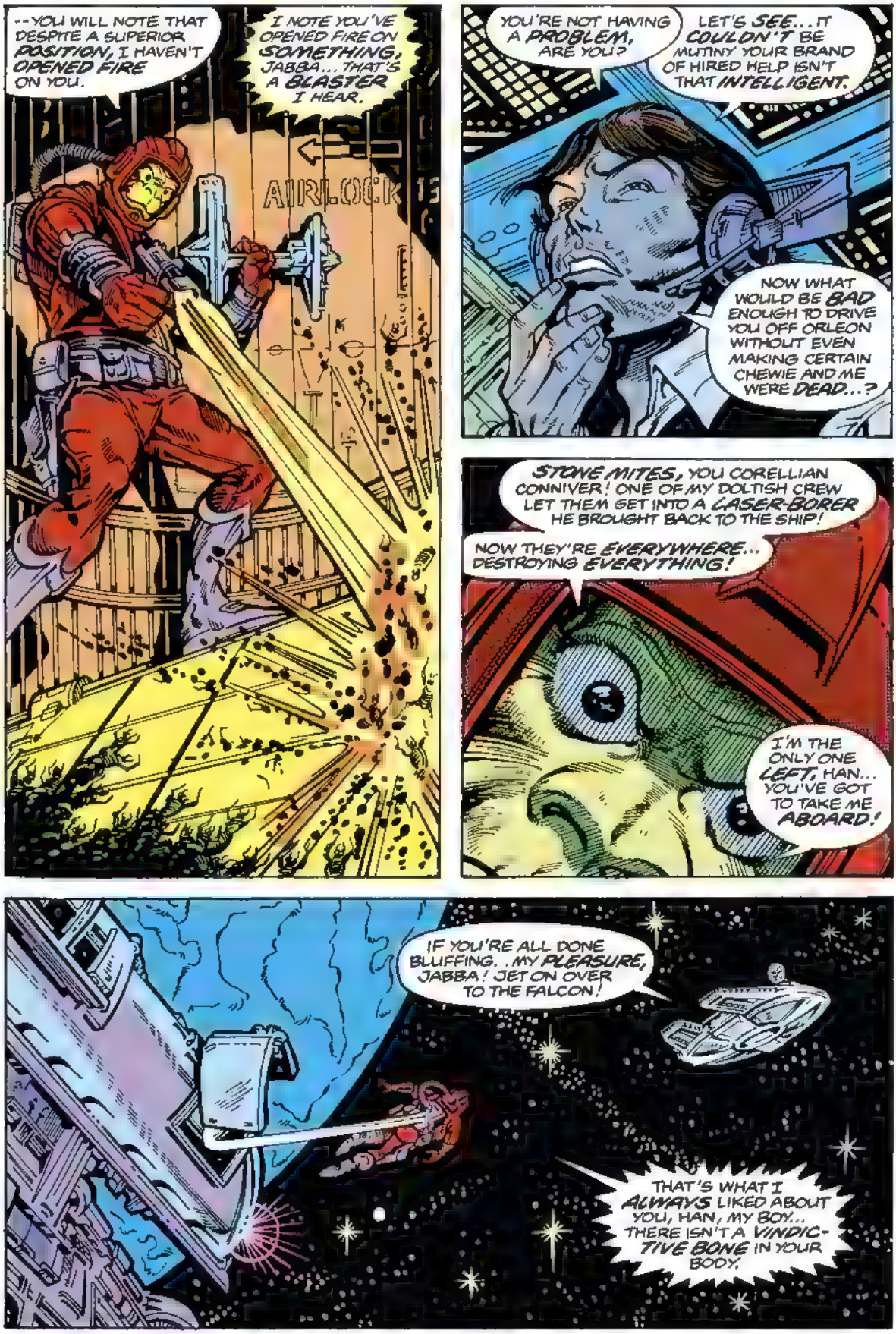
PA-KWOM!
THE SYSTEMS CAN'T TAKE IT... ALL MY CONVERSION MODULES ARE BLOWING!
BLADOW!
SHUT 'ER DOWN, CHEWIE ..! BEFORE THE WHOLE CABIN GOES!

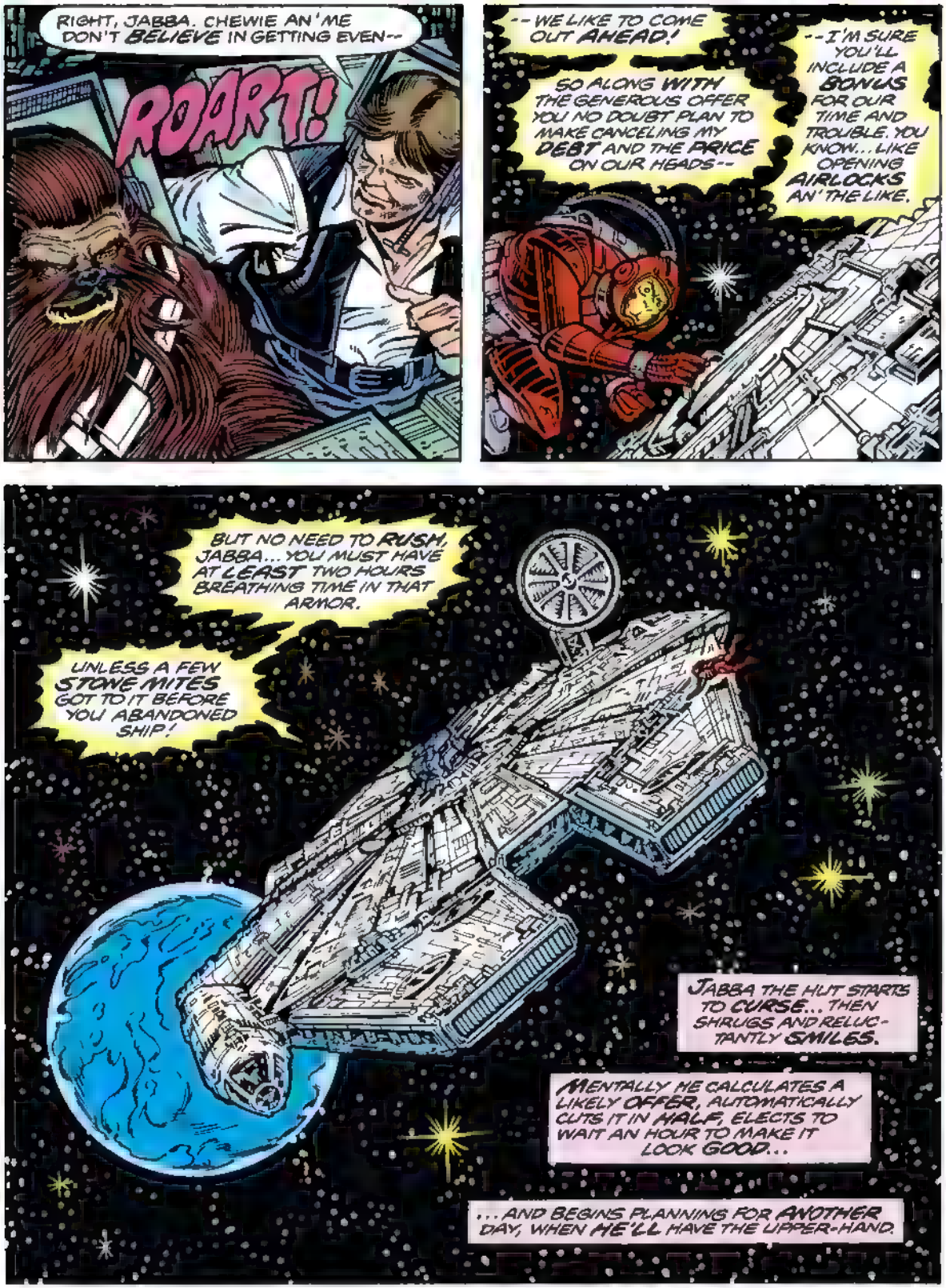
BLAST IT...! WE MADE DARTH VADER AND THE WHOLE EMPIRE LOOK SILLY WITH THIS SHIP!
HOW CAN A BUNCH OF MINDLESS, MUNCHIN' INSECTS BE THE ONES TO DESTROY IT?!


WAIT A MINUTE! BUMP US UP TO A BROADER BAND ON THIS SCANNER, CHEWIE--
I WANNA DO SOME PROBIN' BEYOND THE FALCON.
MAYBE... MAYBE...


FIRE 'ER UP AGAIN CHEWIE ! ONLY THIS TIME WE WON'T USE THE DE-ICING SYSTEM.
OKAY! I'M AT THE MAIN GUNS, PAL, WHEN I START SHOOTING--
ARRK!
--TAKE OFF!
PTOM! PTOM! BVOW!
AND IN THE SHATTERING EXPLOSION OF FLYING STONE... THE MILLENNIUM FALCON BURSTS FREE OF ITS SEEMINGLY INESCAPABLE MOUNTAIN PRISON!
WE DID IT, BIG BUDDY WE DID IT!

OUR TINY FRIENDS MAY HAVE CAUSED US A LOT OF GRIEF... BUT WE COULDN'T HAVE BUSTED LOOSE WITHOUT 'EM' INSTEAD OF A ROOF OF SOLID ROCK ABOVE US--
THE STONE MITES HAD REDUCED THAT SECTION I BLASTED TO A HOLLOW SHELL!
VROWWK!
WATTA YA MEAN, WHY DIDN'T I CHECK THE SCANNER EARLIER TO FIND THAT OUT...?
WHY DIDN'T YOU?
JUST BE GLAD THE HEAT OF HITTING ESCAPE VELOCITY IS TAKING THOSE NASTY LITTLE BUGGERS OFF PERMANENTLY!
FROM NOW ON THERE'S NOTHING AHEAD OF US BUT CLEAR SAILIN' AND--
JABBA'S VOIDRAKER!!
ACTIVATE ALL SHIELDS, CHEWIE... FAST!
THAT GREEDY BLOODSUCKER HAS CAUGHT US FLAT-FOOTED!
HARSH WORDS, HAN--
--PARTICULARLY SINCE I'VE ALMOST FATHERLY FEELINGS ABOUT YOU, MY BOY.
TRUE... I SUBDUED THEM SOMEWHAT DOWN ON ORLEON.
BUT AWAY FROM THAT PLACE'S DREARY ATMOSPHERE... I FEEL MORE FORGIVING. AS PROOF--


--YOU WILL NOTE THAT DESPITE A SUPERIOR POSITION, I HAVEN'T OPENED FIRE ON YOU.
I NOTE YOU'VE OPENED FIRE ON SOMETHING, JABBA... THAT'S A BLASTER I HEAR.
AIRLOCK
YOU'RE NOT HAVING A PROBLEM, ARE YOU?
LET'S SEE... IT COULDN'T BE MUTINY YOUR BRAND OF HIRED HELP ISN'T THAT INTELLIGENT.
NOW WHAT WOULD BE BAD ENOUGH TO DRIVE YOU OFF ORLEON WITHOUT EVEN MAKING CERTAIN CHEWIE AND ME WERE DEAD...?
STONE MITES, YOU CORELLIAN CONNIVER! ONE OF MY DOLTISH CREW LET THEM GET INTO A LASER-BORER HE BROUGHT BACK TO THE SHIP!
NOW THEY'RE EVERYWHERE... DESTROYING EVERYTHING!
I'M THE ONLY ONE LEFT, HAN... YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE ME ABOARD!
IF YOU'RE ALL DONE BLUFFING. . MY PLEASURE, JABBA! JET ON OVER TO THE FALCON!
THAT'S WHAT I ALWAYS LIKED ABOUT YOU, HAN, MY BOY... THERE ISN'T A VINDICTIVE BONE IN YOUR BODY.


RIGHT, JABBA. CHEWIE AN' ME DON'T BELIEVE IN GETTING EVEN--
ROART!
--WE LIKE TO COME OUT AHEAD!
SO ALONG WITH THE GENEROUS OFFER YOU NO DOUBT PLAN TO MAKE CANCELING MY DEBT AND THE PRICE ON OUR HEADS--
--I'M SURE YOU'LL INCLUDE A BONUS FOR OUR TIME AND TROUBLE. YOU KNOW... LIKE OPENING AIRLOCKS AN' THE LIKE.
BUT NO NEED TO RUSH, JABBA... YOU MUST HAVE AT LEAST TWO HOURS BREATHING TIME IN THAT ARMOR.
UNLESS A FEW STONE MITES GOT TO IT BEFORE YOU ABANDONED SHIP!
JABBA THE HUT STARTS TO CURSE... THEN SHRUGS AND RELUCTANTLY SMILES.
MENTALLY HE CALCULATES A LIKELY OFFER, AUTOMATICALLY CUTS IT IN HALF, ELECTS TO WAIT AN HOUR TO MAKE IT LOOK GOOD...
...AND BEGINS PLANNING FOR ANOTHER DAY, WHEN HE'LL HAVE THE UPPER-HAND.

BUT MEANTIME, DARTH VADER IS ALSO PLANNING, AS WILL BE SHOWN NEXT ISSUE IN...

DARK ENCOUNTER

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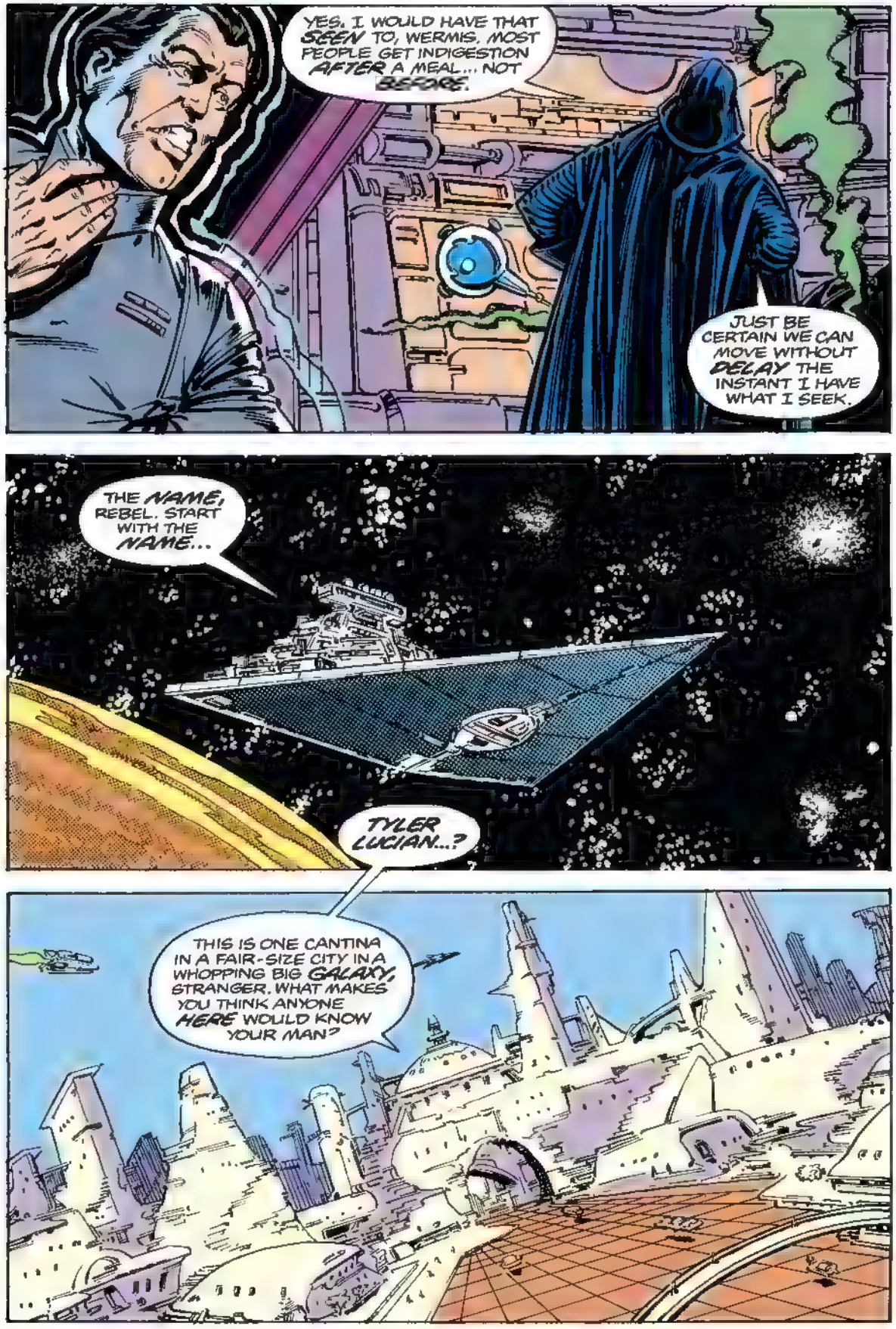
CONTINUING THE SAGA BEGUN IN THE FILM BY GEORGE LUCAS RELEASED BY TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

ARCHIE GOODWIN WRITER/EDITOR * CARMINE INFANTINO & BOB WIACEK ARTISTS * JOHN COSTANZA LETTERER * GLYNIS WEIN COLORIST * JIM SHOOTER CONSULTING ED.

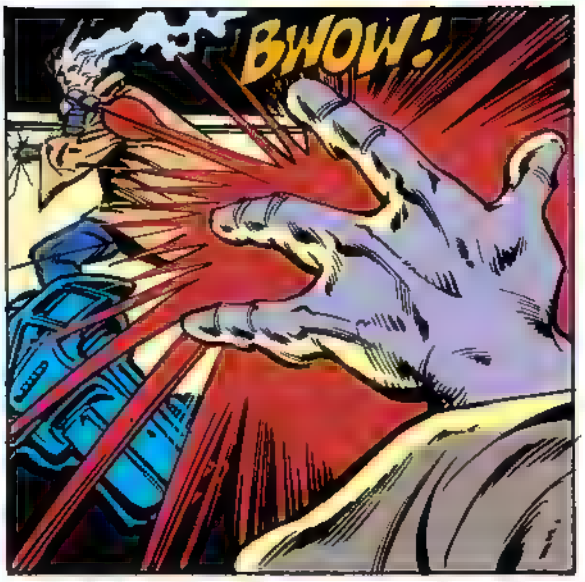
DARK ENCOUNTER

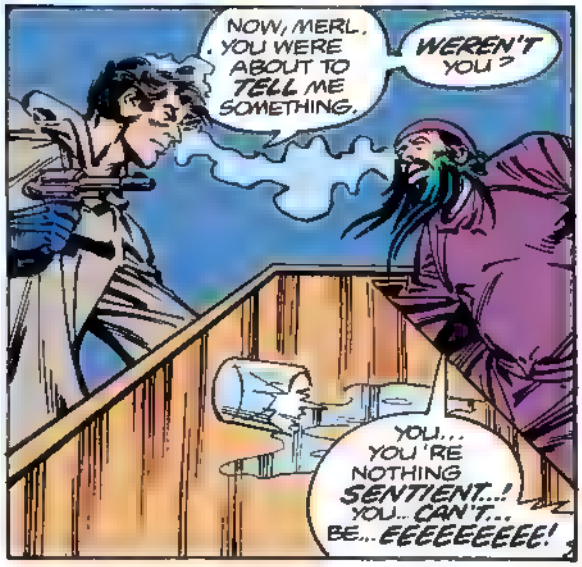
NO MORE...! NO MORE! ANYTHING YOU WANT...I'LL TELL...! I'LL TELL!
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU MEN?
TURN AROUND! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE AT ATTENTION.
DON'T TELL ME VETERAN STORMTROOPERS HAVEN'T HEARD SCREAMS BEFORE!
THEY HAVE. BUT, SOMEHOW, NOT LIKE THESE. NOT SCREAMS TWISTED OUT OF A MAN'S VERY SOUL BY A MASTER MANIPULATOR...

...DARTH VADER, LORD OF THE SITH.
THE ABILITY TO RESIST IS ALWAYS FASCINATING, EH, WERMIS?
IT VARIES ENDLESSLY FROM INDIVIDUAL TO INDIVIDUAL.
THIS SPY WAS BETTER AT IT THAN AVERAGE, WOULDN'T YOU SAY?
I--I WONDER... IF I MIGHT BE EXCUSED, LORD VADER...? I SEEM TO HAVE A TOUCH OF... INDIGESTION.

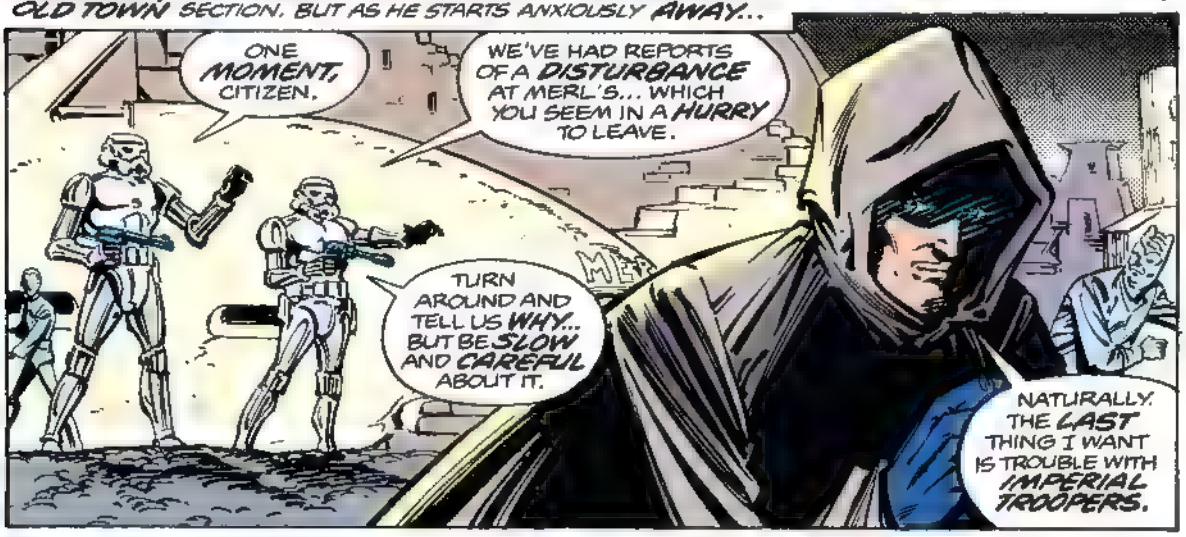

YES, I WOULD HAVE THAT SEEN TO, WERMIS, MOST PEOPLE GET INDIGESTION AFTER A MEAL... NOT BEFORE.
JUST BE CERTAIN WE CAN MOVE WITHOUT DELAY THE INSTANT I HAVE WHAT I SEEK.
THE NAME, REBEL. START WITH THE NAME...
TYLER LUCIAN...?
THIS IS ONE CANTINA IN A FAIR-SIZE CITY IN A WHOPPING BIG GALAXY, STRANGER. WHAT MAKES YOU THINK ANYONE HERE WOULD KNOW YOUR MAN?

BECAUSE IN ADDITION TO RUNNING THIS DINGY ESTABLISHMENT, YOU HIDE PEOPLE, MERL... FOR A PRICE.
AND TYLER LUCIAN HAS GOOD REASON TO HIDE... HE'S A DESERTER FROM THE REBEL ALLIANCE.
STRANGER, IF ANY OF WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE... AIN'T IT A BIT FOOLISH TO GO BLURTIN' IT OUT?
THERE ISN'T TIME TO BE SUBTLE, MERL--
--AND ON YOUR TYPE IT WOULD BE WASTED ANYWAY!
MY HAND!
WRAAK!
Y-YOU... SMASHED RIGHT THROUGH THE BAR...! THAT'S NOT POS--
:AAGGHHHH!:
URI... GLOCKEN...! MOVE! HE'S CRUSHING... MY HAND...!
FA-KOWM!

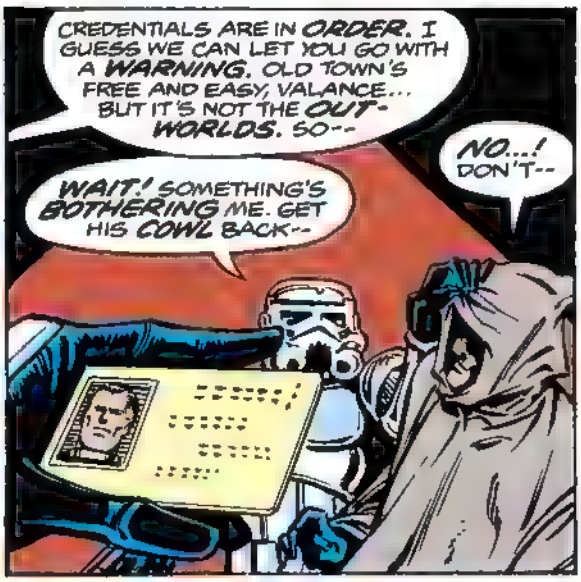




SWIFTLY, THE CANTINA OWNER BEGINS TO TALK. A SHORT TIME LATER, THE CLOAKED FIGURE DEPARTS, STEPPING OUT ONTO THE MAIN THOROUGHFARE OF CENTARES SPACE PORT'S INFAMOUS OLD TOWN SECTION. BUT AS HE STARTS ANXIOUSLY AWAY...


ONE MOMENT, CITIZEN.
WE'VE HAD REPORTS OF A DISTURBANCE AT MERL'S... WHICH YOU SEEM IN A HURRY TO LEAVE.
TURN AROUND AND TELL US WHY... BUT BE SLOW AND CAREFUL ABOUT IT.
NATURALLY. THE LAST THING I WANT IS TROUBLE WITH IMPERIAL TROOPERS.

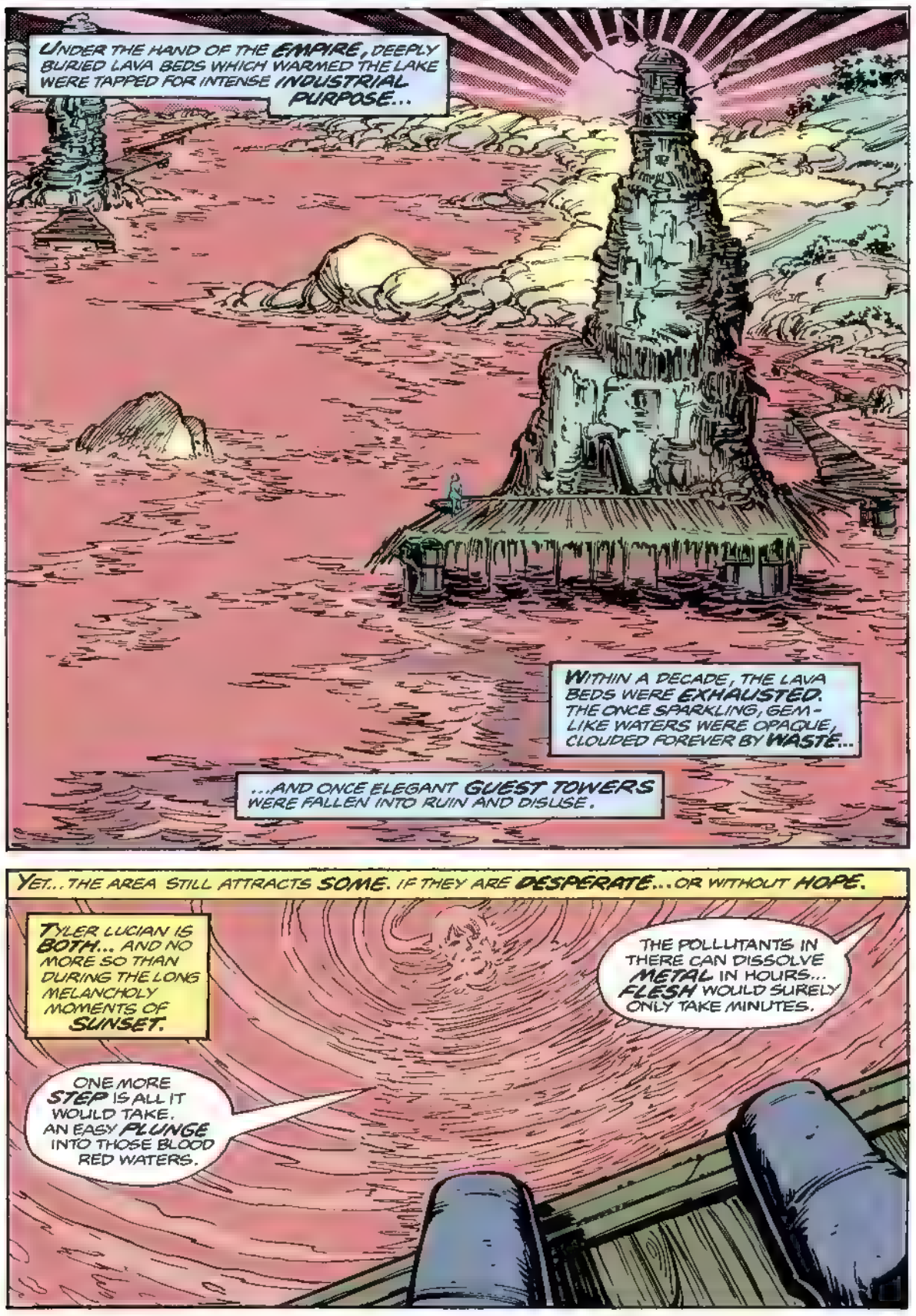
MY NAME IS VALANCE. I'M A BOUNTY HUNTER... DULY LICENSED FOR THIS AND TWENTY-EIGHT OTHER SYSTEMS.
TWO CASINO CUSTOMERS MISTAKENLY THOUGHT I WAS LOOKING FOR THEM. BY THE TIME WE STRAIGHTENED IT OUT--
--THEY WERE DEAD AND SO WAS MERL. I WAS RUSHING TO REPORT IT WHEN YOU STOPPED ME.

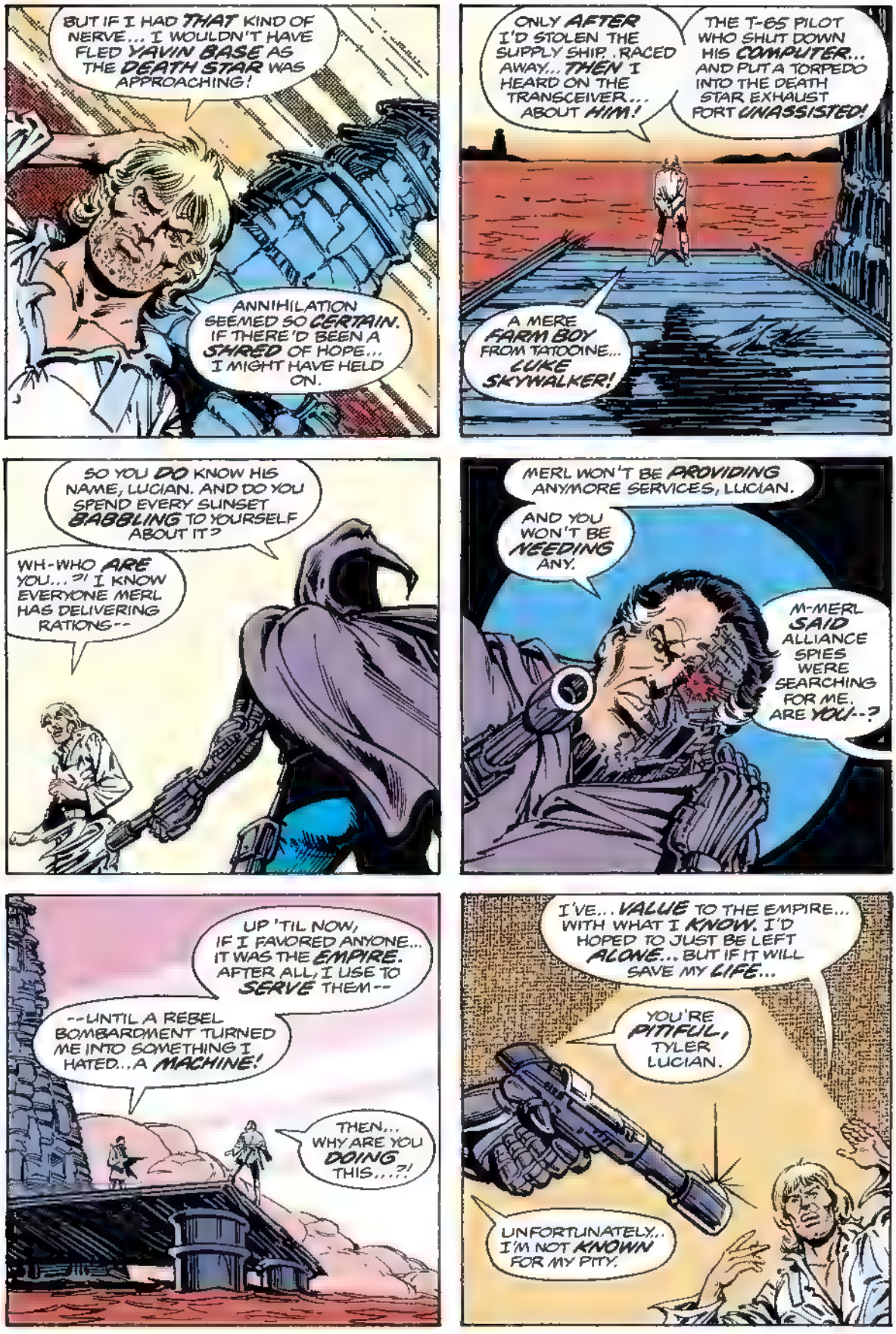

CREDENTIALS ARE IN ORDER. I GUESS WE CAN LET YOU GO WITH A WARNING. OLD TOWN'S FREE AND EASY, VALANCE... BUT IT'S NOT THE OUTWORLDS. SO--
NO...! DON'T--
WAIT! SOMETHING'S BOTHERING ME. GET HIS COWL BACK--

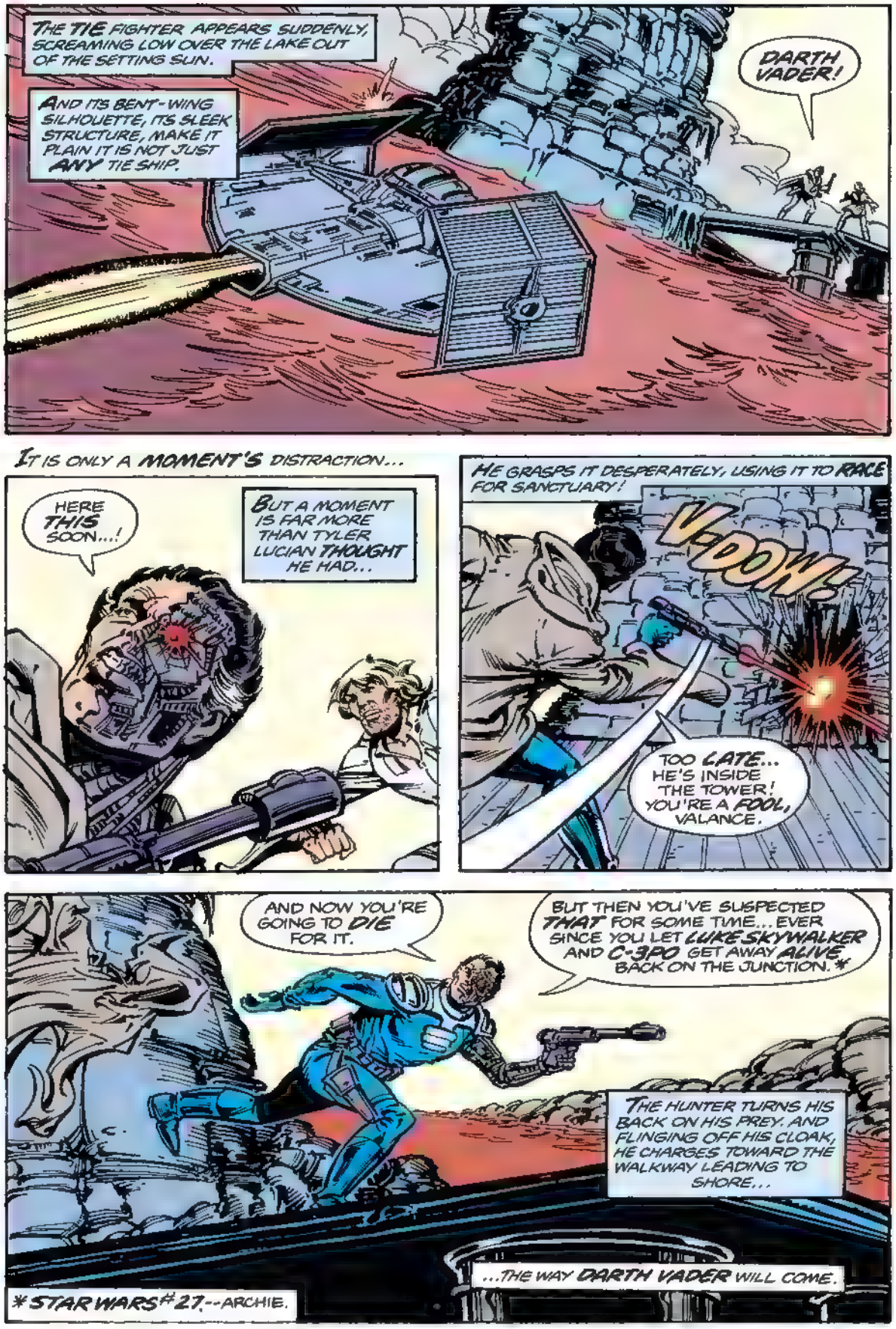
I THOUGHT I SAW A GLINT OF METAL! HE'S--
A BORG! MISERABLE CYBORG... TRYING TO PASS!
WE CAN'T LET SOMETHING LIKE HIM GET AWAY WITH KILLING NORMAL ORGANICS!

THANK YOU, TROOPER! UNTIL NOW I DON'T THINK I WAS CERTAIN ABOUT MY COURSE OF ACTION--
FRAZAK!

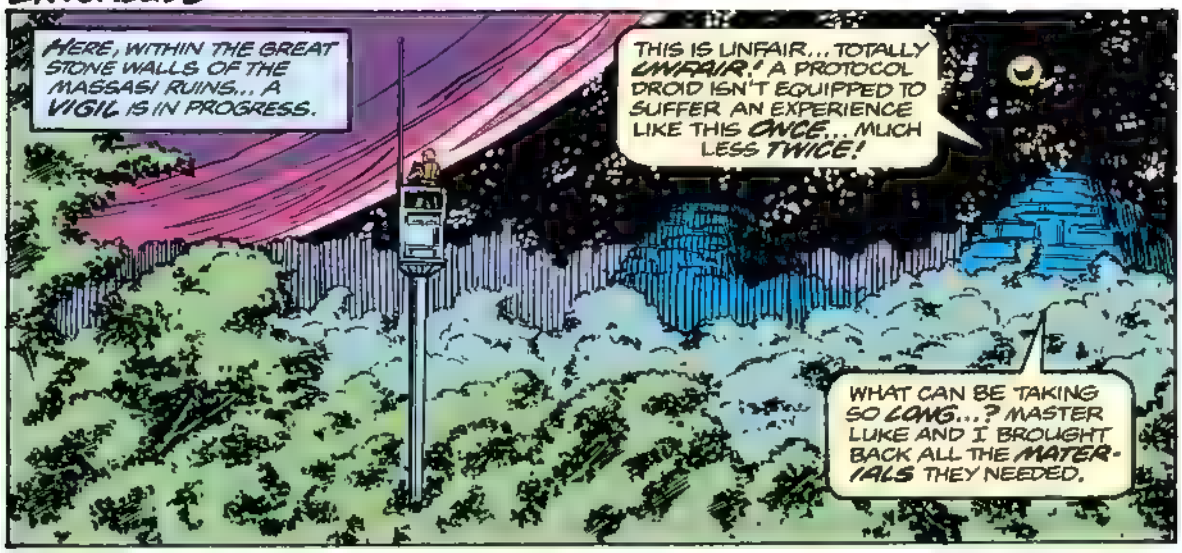
NOW I'M COMMITTED. I'M IN A RACE AGAINST DARTH VADER--
--AND TYLER LUCIAN IS THE PRIZE!

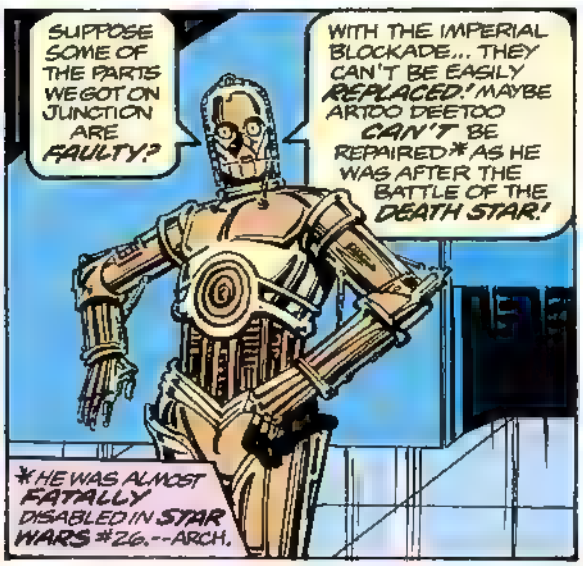

IN THE DAYS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC, RUBYFLAME LAKE WAS A SPLENDID, POPULAR RESORT, ATTRACTING VISITORS BY THE THOUSANDS TO CENTARES FROM THROUGHOUT THE MID-SYSTEMS.
UNDER THE HAND OF THE EMPIRE, DEEPLY BURIED LAVA BEDS WHICH WARMED THE LAKE WERE TAPPED FOR INTENSE INDUSTRIAL PURPOSE...
WITHIN A DECADE, THE LAVA BEDS WERE EXHAUSTED. THE ONCE SPARKLING, GEM-LIKE WATERS WERE OPAQUE, CLOUDED FOREVER BY WASTE...
...AND ONCE ELEGANT GUEST TOWERS WERE FALLEN INTO RUIN AND DISUSE.
YET...THE AREA STILL ATTRACTS SOME. IF THEY ARE DESPERATE...OR WITHOUT HOPE.
TYLER LUCIAN IS BOTH... AND NO MORE SO THAN DURING THE LONG MELANCHOLY MOMENTS OF SUNSET.
THE POLLUTANTS IN THERE CAN DISSOLVE METAL IN HOURS... FLESH WOULD SURELY ONLY TAKE MINUTES.
ONE MORE STEP IS ALL IT WOULD TAKE. AN EASY PLUNGE INTO THOSE BLOOD RED WATERS.

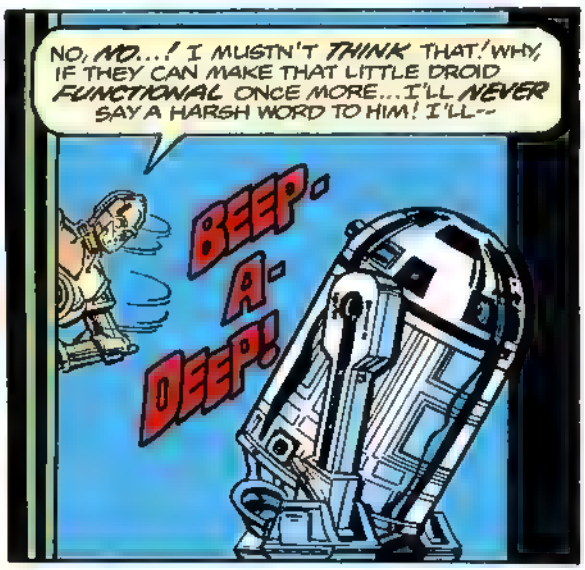

BUT IF I HAD THAT KIND OF NERVE... I WOULDN'T HAVE FLED YAVIN BASE AS THE DEATH STAR WAS APPROACHING!
ANNIHILATION SEEMED SO CERTAIN. IF THERE'D BEEN A SHRED OF HOPE... I MIGHT HAVE HELD ON.
ONLY AFTER I'D STOLEN THE SUPPLY SHIP...RACED AWAY... THEN I HEARD ON THE TRANSCEIVER... ABOUT HIM!
THE T-65 PILOT WHO SHUT DOWN HIS COMPUTER... AND PUT A TORPEDO INTO THE DEATH STAR EXHAUST PORT UNASSISTED!
A MERE FARM BOY FROM TATOOINE... LUKE SKYWALKER!
SO YOU DO KNOW HIS NAME, LUCIAN. AND DO YOU SPEND EVERY SUNSET BABBLING TO YOURSELF ABOUT IT?
WH-WHO ARE YOU...?! I KNOW EVERYONE MERL HAS DELIVERING RATIONS--
MERL WON'T BE PROVIDING ANYMORE SERVICES, LUCIAN.
AND YOU WON'T BE NEEDING ANY.
M-MERL SAID ALLIANCE SPIES WERE SEARCHING FOR ME. ARE YOU--?
UP 'TIL NOW, IF I FAVORED ANYONE... IT WAS THE EMPIRE. AFTER ALL, I USE TO SERVE THEM--
--UNTIL A REBEL BOMBARDMENT TURNED ME INTO SOMETHING I HATED...A MACHINE!
THEN... WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS...?!
I'VE... VALUE TO THE EMPIRE... WITH WHAT I KNOW. I'D HOPED TO JUST BE LEFT ALONE... BUT IF IT WILL SAVE MY LIFE...
YOU'RE PITIFUL, TYLER LUCIAN.
UNFORTUNATELY.. I'M NOT KNOWN FOR MY PITY.

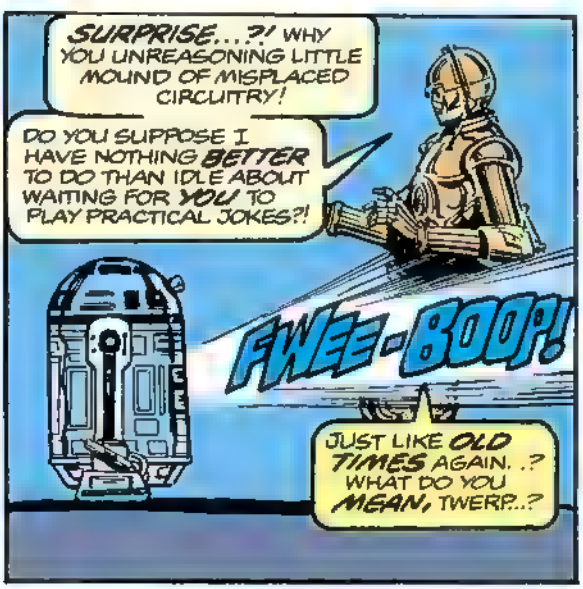

THE TIE FIGHTER APPEARS SUDDENLY, SCREAMING LOW OVER THE LAKE OUT OF THE SETTING SUN.
AND ITS BENT-WING SILHOUETTE, ITS SLEEK STRUCTURE, MAKE IT PLAIN IT IS NOT JUST ANY TIE SHIP.
DARTH VADER!
IT IS ONLY A MOMENT'S DISTRACTION...
HERE THIS SOON...!
BUT A MOMENT IS FAR MORE THAN TYLER LUCIAN THOUGHT HE HAD...
HE GRASPS IT DESPERATELY, USING IT TO RACE FOR SANCTUARY!
V-DOOM!
TOO LATE... HE'S INSIDE THE TOWER! YOU'RE A FOOL, VALANCE.
AND NOW YOU'RE GOING TO DIE FOR IT.
BUT THEN YOU'VE SUSPECTED THAT FOR SOME TIME... EVER SINCE YOU LET LUKE SKYWALKER AND C-3PO GET AWAY ALIVE BACK ON THE JUNCTION.*
THE HUNTER TURNS HIS BACK ON HIS PREY, AND FLINGING OFF HIS CLOAK, HE CHARGES TOWARD THE WALKWAY LEADING TO SHORE...
...THE WAY DARTH VADER WILL COME.
*STAR WARS #27.--ARCHIE.

INTERLUDE: THE MAIN REBEL BASE ON THE FOURTH MOON OF THE GAS GIANT, YAVIN.

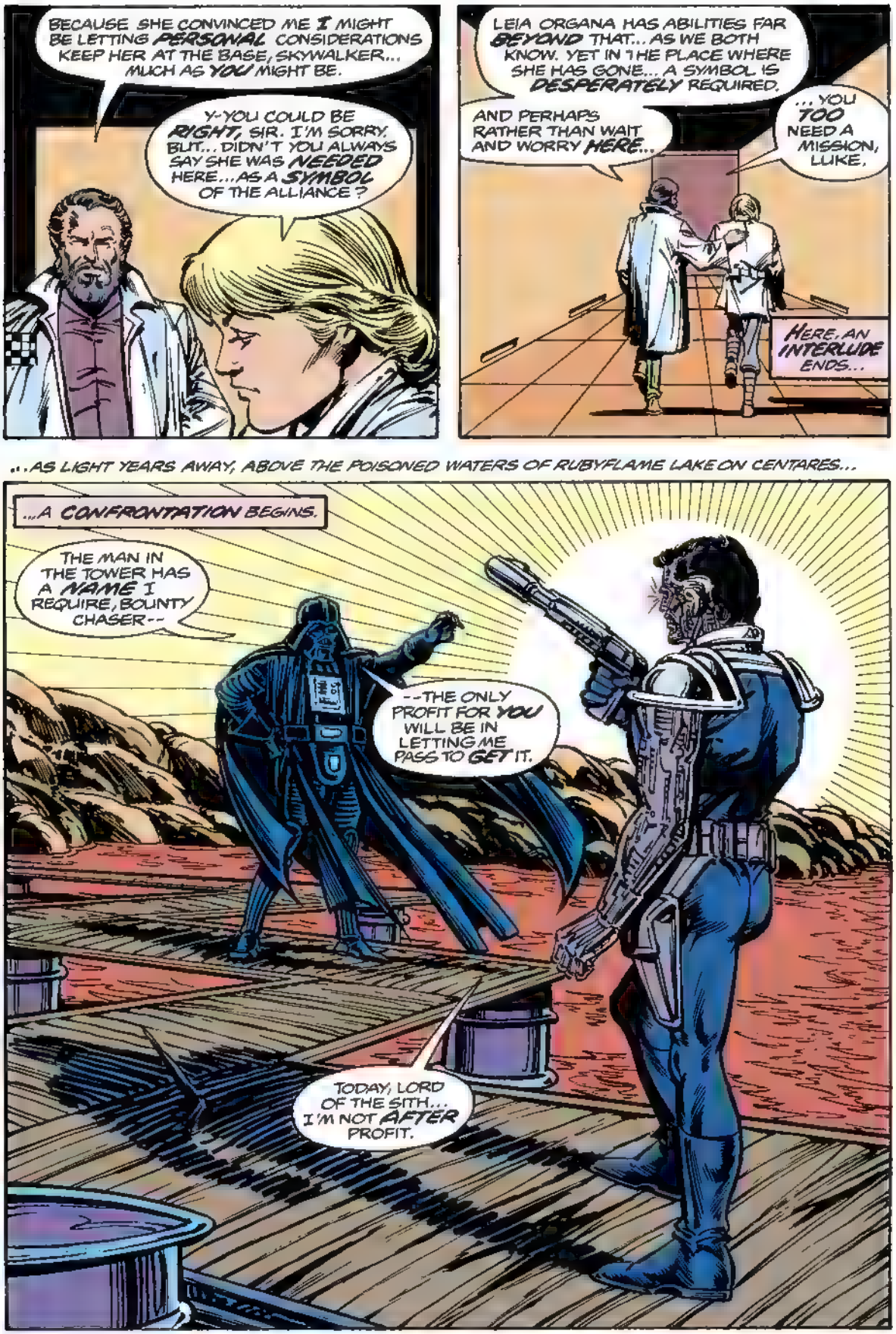

HERE, WITHIN THE GREAT STONE WALLS OF THE MASSASI RUINS... A VIGIL IS IN PROGRESS.
THIS IS UNFAIR... TOTALLY UNFAIR! A PROTOCOL DROID ISN'T EQUIPPED TO SUFFER AN EXPERIENCE LIKE THIS ONCE... MUCH LESS TWICE!
WHAT CAN BE TAKING SO LONG...? MASTER LUKE AND I BROUGHT BACK ALL THE MATERIALS THEY NEEDED.


SUPPOSE SOME OF THE PARTS WE GOT ON JUNCTION ARE FAULTY?
WITH THE IMPERIAL BLOCKADE... THEY CAN'T BE EASILY REPLACED! MAYBE ARTOO DEETOO CAN'T BE REPAIRED* AS HE WAS AFTER THE BATTLE OF THE DEATH STAR!
*HE WAS ALMOST FATALLY DISABLED IN STAR WARS #26.--ARCH.

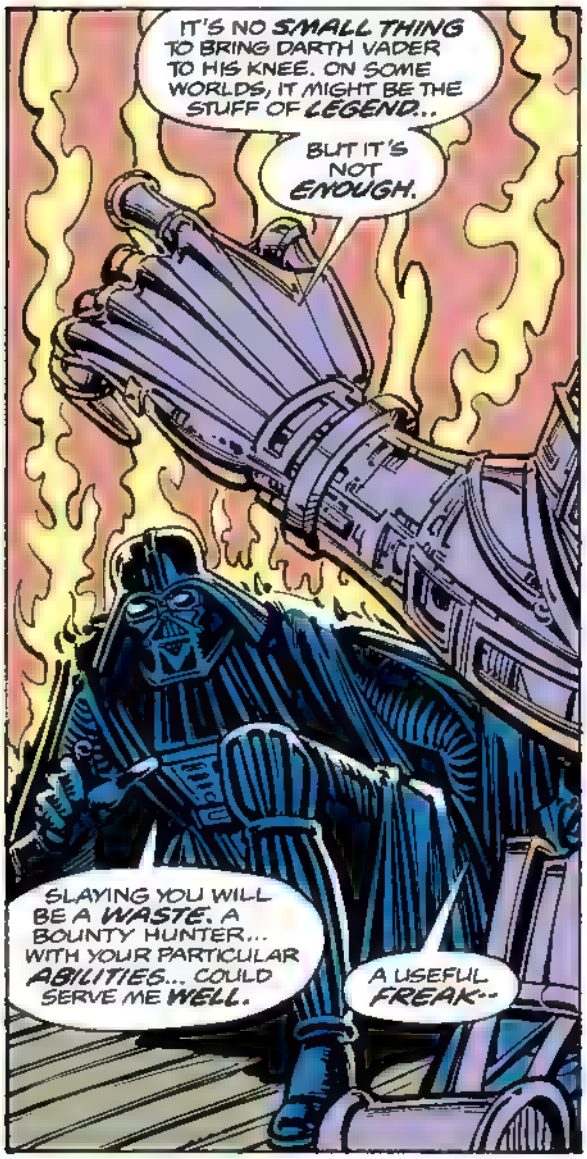

NO, NO...! I MUSTN'T THINK THAT! WHY, IF THEY CAN MAKE THAT LITTLE DROID FUNCTIONAL ONCE MORE... I'LL NEVER SAY A HARSH WORD TO HIM! I'LL--
BEEP-A-DEEP!


SURPRISE...?! WHY YOU UNREASONING LITTLE MOUND OF MISPLACED CIRCUITRY!
DO YOU SUPPOSE I HAVE NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN IDLE ABOUT WAITING FOR YOU TO PLAY PRACTICAL JOKES?!
FWEE-BOOP!
JUST LIKE OLD TIMES AGAIN..? WHAT DO YOU MEAN, TWERP...?

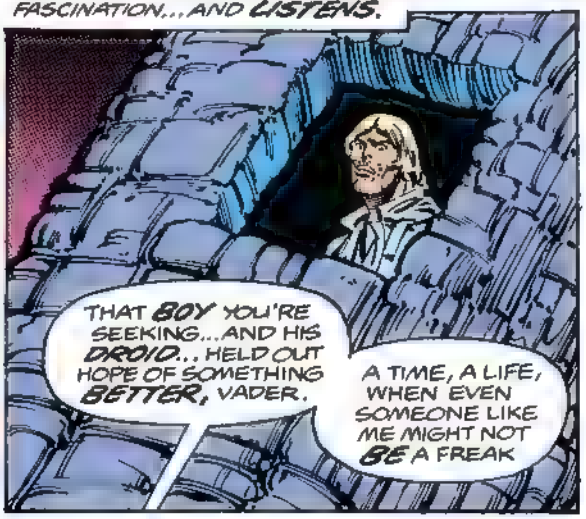
AND AS A PERPETUAL ARGUMENT IS RESUMED OUTSIDE THE SUPPLY AND MAINTENANCE AREA...

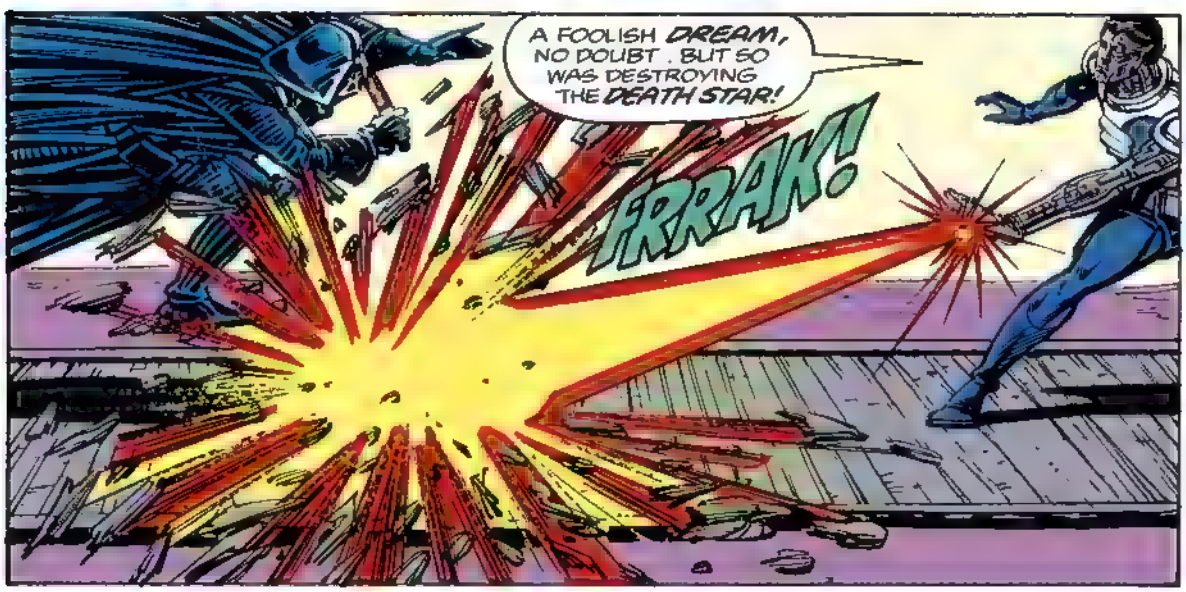

BECAUSE SHE CONVINCED ME I MIGHT BE LETTING PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS KEEP HER AT THE BASE, SKYWALKER... MUCH AS YOU MIGHT BE.
Y-YOU COULD BE RIGHT, SIR. I'M SORRY, BUT... DIDN'T YOU ALWAYS SAY SHE WAS NEEDED HERE... AS A SYMBOL OF THE ALLIANCE?
LEIA ORGANA HAS ABILITIES FAR BEYOND THAT... AS WE BOTH KNOW. YET IN THE PLACE WHERE SHE HAS GONE... A SYMBOL IS DESPERATELY REQUIRED.
AND PERHAPS RATHER THAN WAIT AND WORRY HERE...
...YOU TOO NEED A MISSION, LUKE.
HERE, AN INTERLUDE ENDS...
...AS LIGHT YEARS AWAY, ABOVE THE POISONED WATERS OF RUBYFLAME LAKE ON CENTARES...
...A CONFRONTATION BEGINS.
THE MAN IN THE TOWER HAS A NAME I REQUIRE, BOUNTY CHASER--
--THE ONLY PROFIT FOR YOU WILL BE IN LETTING ME PASS TO GET IT.
TODAY, LORD OF THE SITH... I'M NOT AFTER PROFIT.

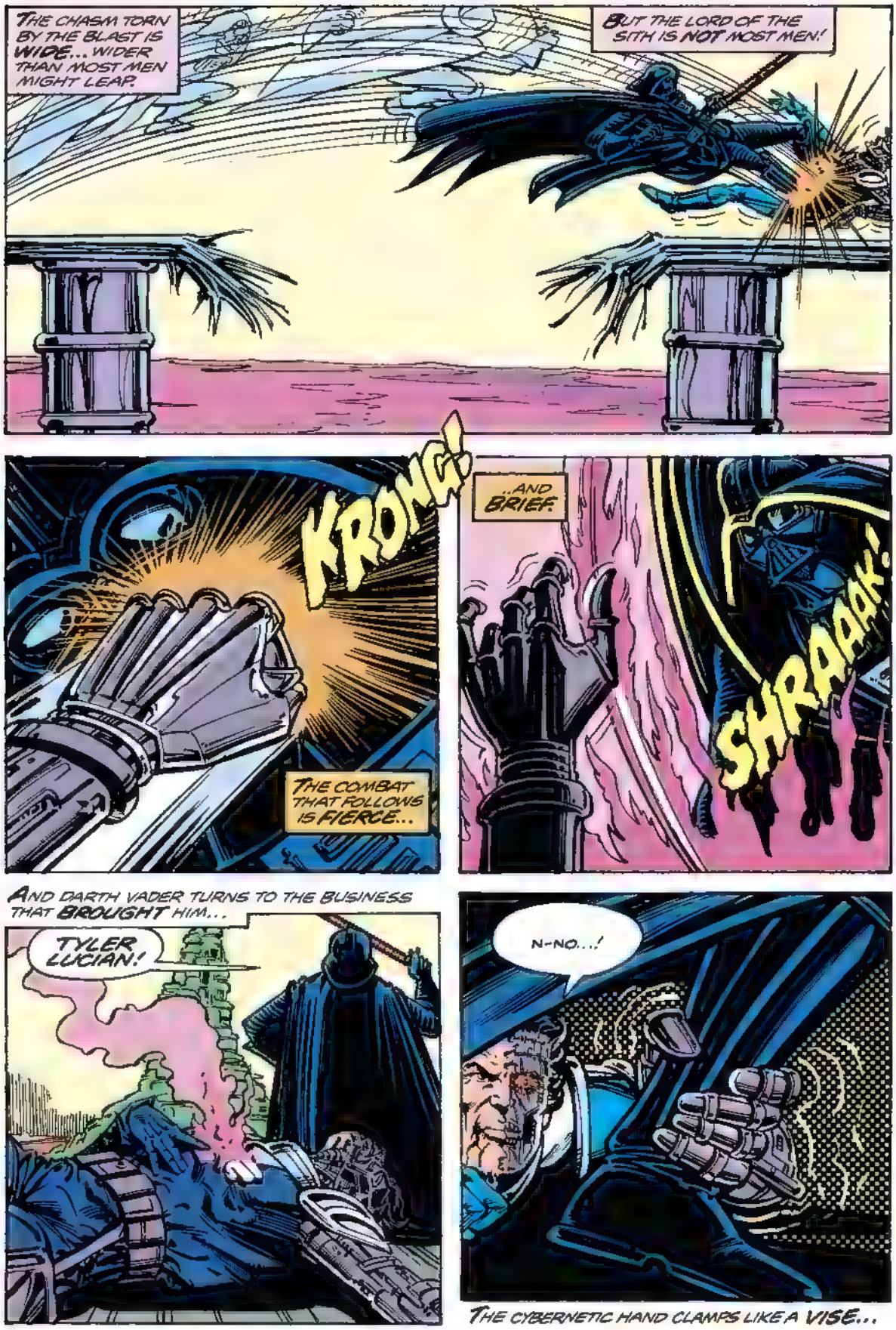
YOU MAY HAVE WRUNG TYLER LUCIAN'S NAME FROM SOME REBEL SPY--
--BUT I'M READY TO FIGHT TO SEE YOU DON'T GET THE DEATH STAR DESTROYER'S NAME FROM HIM.
I BELIEVE YOU, VALANCE--
--BUT THE WHY OF IT INTRIGUES ME. WHEN I FIRST HEARD OF YOU... * WE SEEMED RIVALS FOR THE SAME PREY.
DON'T TALK, VADER... DEPEND YOURSELF.
SURELY YOU'VE NOTICED... I ALREADY AM.
* SW #21--AG
WHY ELSE HAVEN'T YOU BEEN ABLE TO FIRE YET--?
WHY ELSE HAS YOUR WEAPON BECOME SO HEAVY--
--IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO HOLD?
HOW CAN YOU FIGHT... AGAINST THE POWER OF THE FORCE?
LIKE... THIS...!
FRA-KOW!

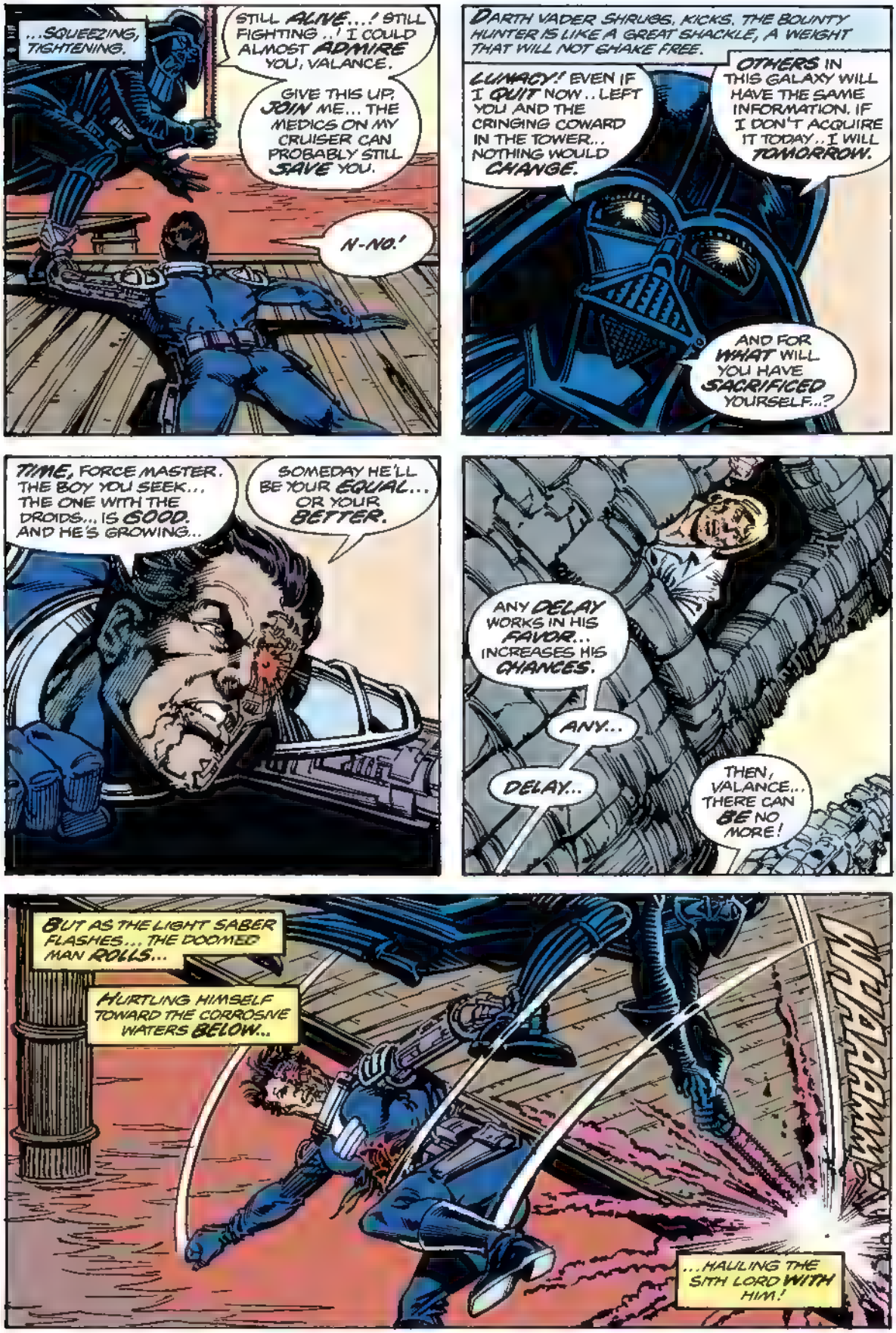

IT'S NO SMALL THING TO BRING DARTH VADER TO HIS KNEE. ON SOME WORLDS, IT MIGHT BE THE STUFF OF LEGEND..
BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH.
SLAYING YOU WILL BE A WASTE. A BOUNTY HUNTER... WITH YOUR PARTICULAR ABILITIES... COULD SERVE ME WELL.
A USEFUL FREAK--

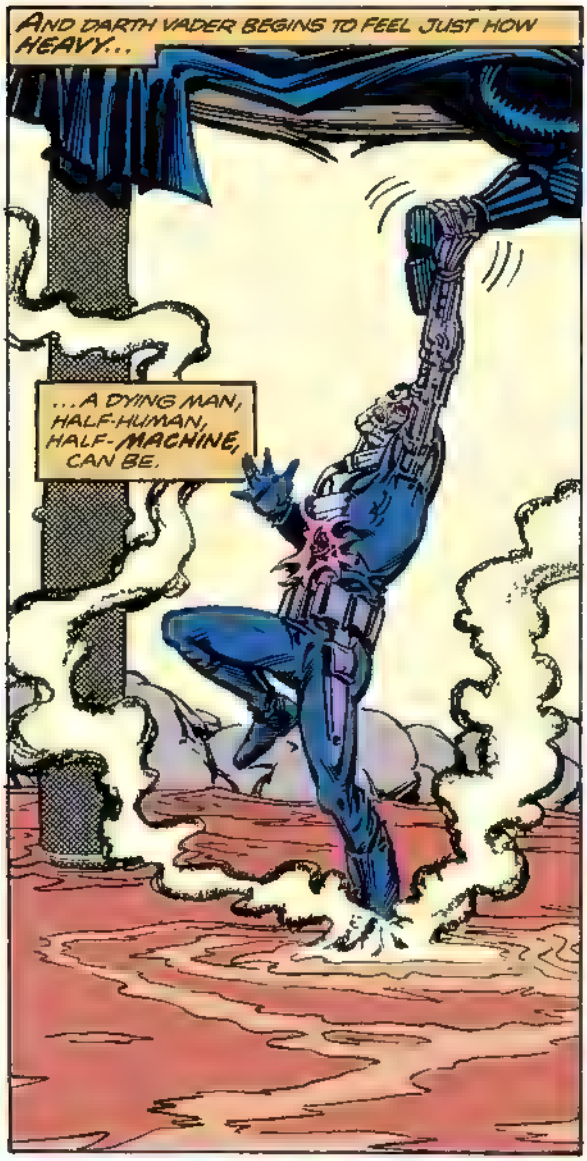
HIGH IN THE DECAYING TOWER BEYOND THE WALKWAY, TYLER LUCIAN WATCHES WITH HORRIBLE FASCINATION... AND LISTENS.

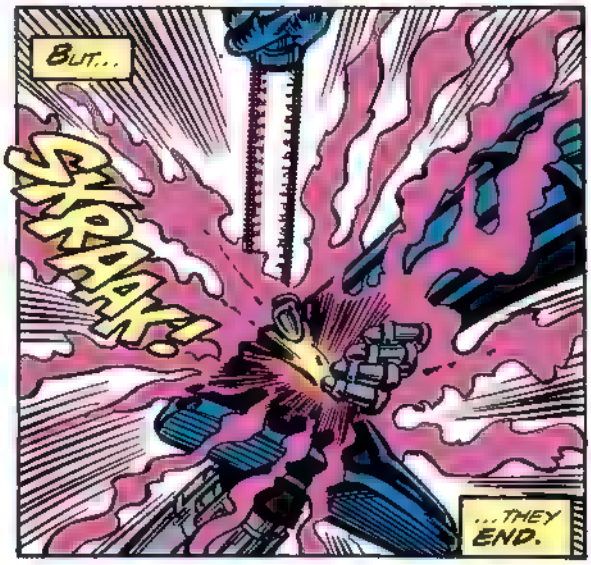

THAT BOY YOU'RE SEEKING...AND HIS DROID... HELD OUT HOPE OF SOMETHING BETTER, VADER.
A TIME, A LIFE, WHEN EVEN SOMEONE LIKE ME MIGHT NOT BE A FREAK

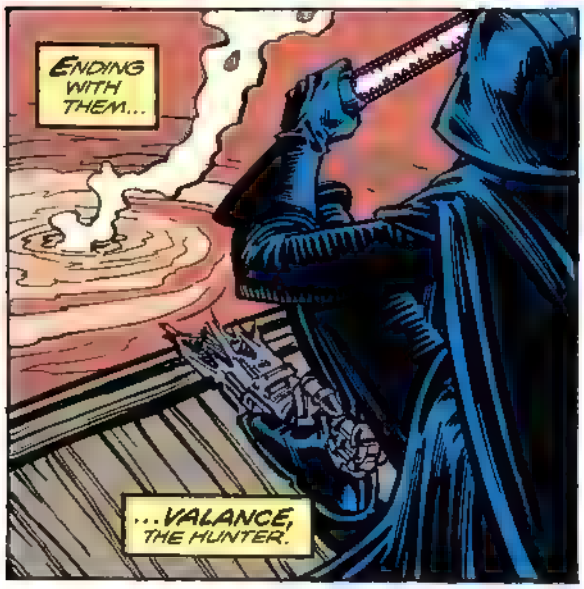



THE CHASM TORN BY THE BLAST IS WIDE... WIDER THAN MOST MEN MIGHT LEAP.
BUT THE LORD OF THE SITH IS NOT MOST MEN!
KRONG!
THE COMBAT THAT FOLLOWS IS FIERCE...
...AND BRIEF.
SHRAAAK!
AND DARTH VADER TURNS TO THE BUSINESS THAT BROUGHT HIM...
TYLER LUCIAN!
N-NO...!
THE CYBERNETIC HAND CLAMPS LIKE A VISE...

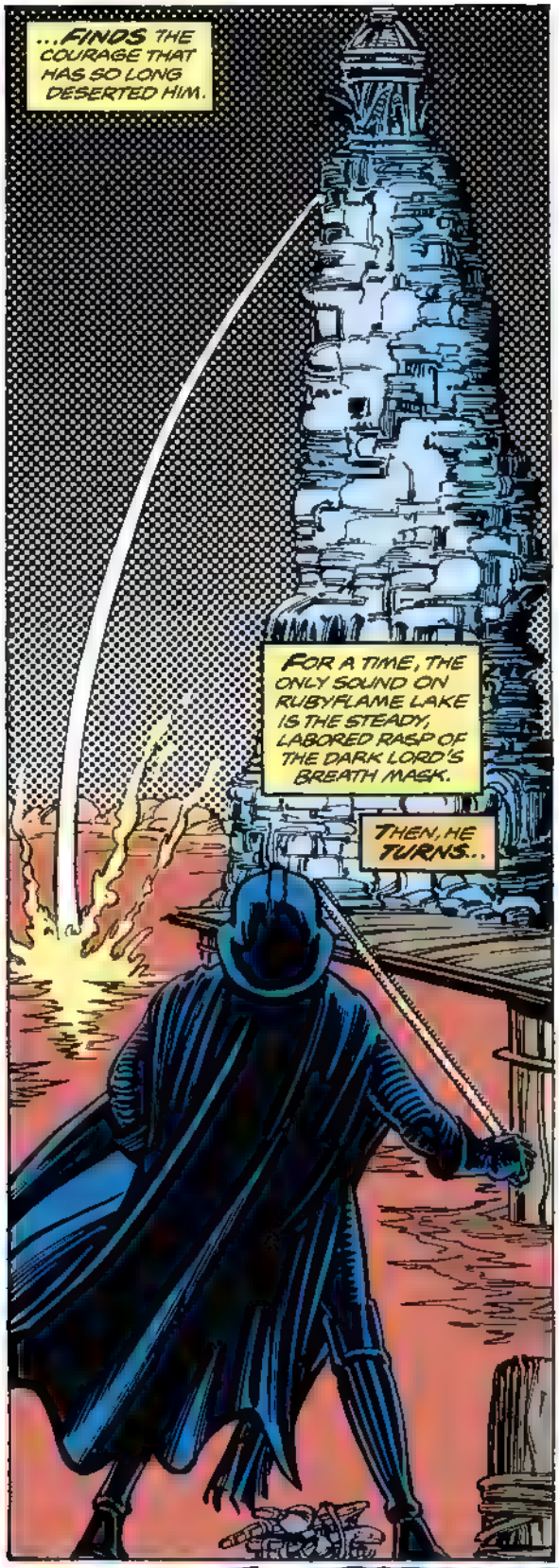

...SQUEEZING, TIGHTENING.
STILL ALIVE...! STILL FIGHTING..! I COULD ALMOST ADMIRE YOU, VALANCE.
GIVE THIS UP, JOIN ME... THE MEDICS ON MY CRUISER CAN PROBABLY STILL SAVE YOU.
N-NO!
DARTH VADER SHRUGS, KICKS, THE BOUNTY HUNTER IS LIKE A GREAT SHACKLE, A WEIGHT THAT WILL NOT SHAKE FREE.
LUNACY! EVEN IF I QUIT NOW.. LEFT YOU AND THE CRINGING COWARD IN THE TOWER... NOTHING WOULD CHANGE.
OTHERS IN THIS GALAXY WILL HAVE THE SAME INFORMATION. IF I DON'T ACQUIRE IT TODAY.. I WILL TOMORROW.
AND FOR WHAT WILL YOU HAVE SACRIFICED YOURSELF...?
TIME, FORCE MASTER. THE BOY YOU SEEK... THE ONE WITH THE DROIDS... IS GOOD. AND HE'S GROWING..
SOMEDAY HE'LL BE YOUR EQUAL... OR YOUR BETTER.
ANY DELAY WORKS IN HIS FAVOR... INCREASES HIS CHANCES.
ANY...
DELAY...
THEN, VALANCE... THERE CAN BE NO MORE!
BUT AS THE LIGHT SABER FLASHES... THE DOOMED MAN ROLLS...
HURTLING HIMSELF TOWARD THE CORROSIVE WATERS BELOW..
...HAULING THE SITH LORD WITH HIM!



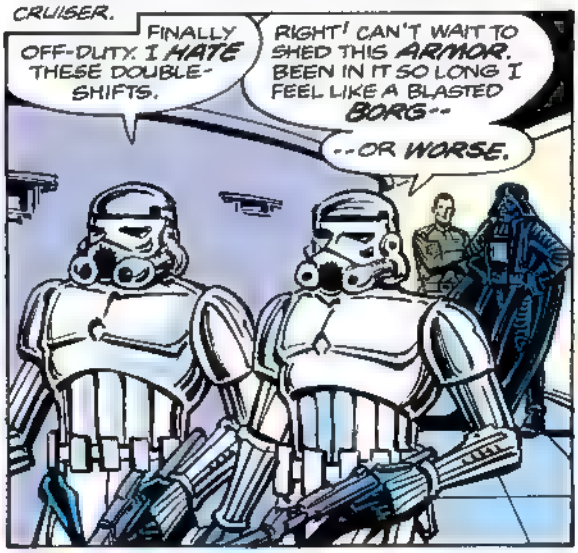




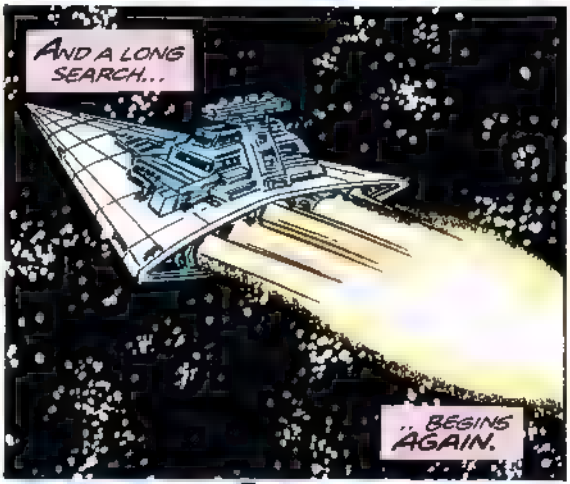
AND THE MAN WHO COULD NOT FACE THE DEATH STAR...


...FINDS THE COURAGE THAT HAS SO LONG DESERTED HIM.
FOR A TIME, THE ONLY SOUND ON RUBYFLAME LAKE IS THE STEADY, LABORED RASP OF THE DARK LORD'S BREATH MASK.
THEN, HE TURNS..

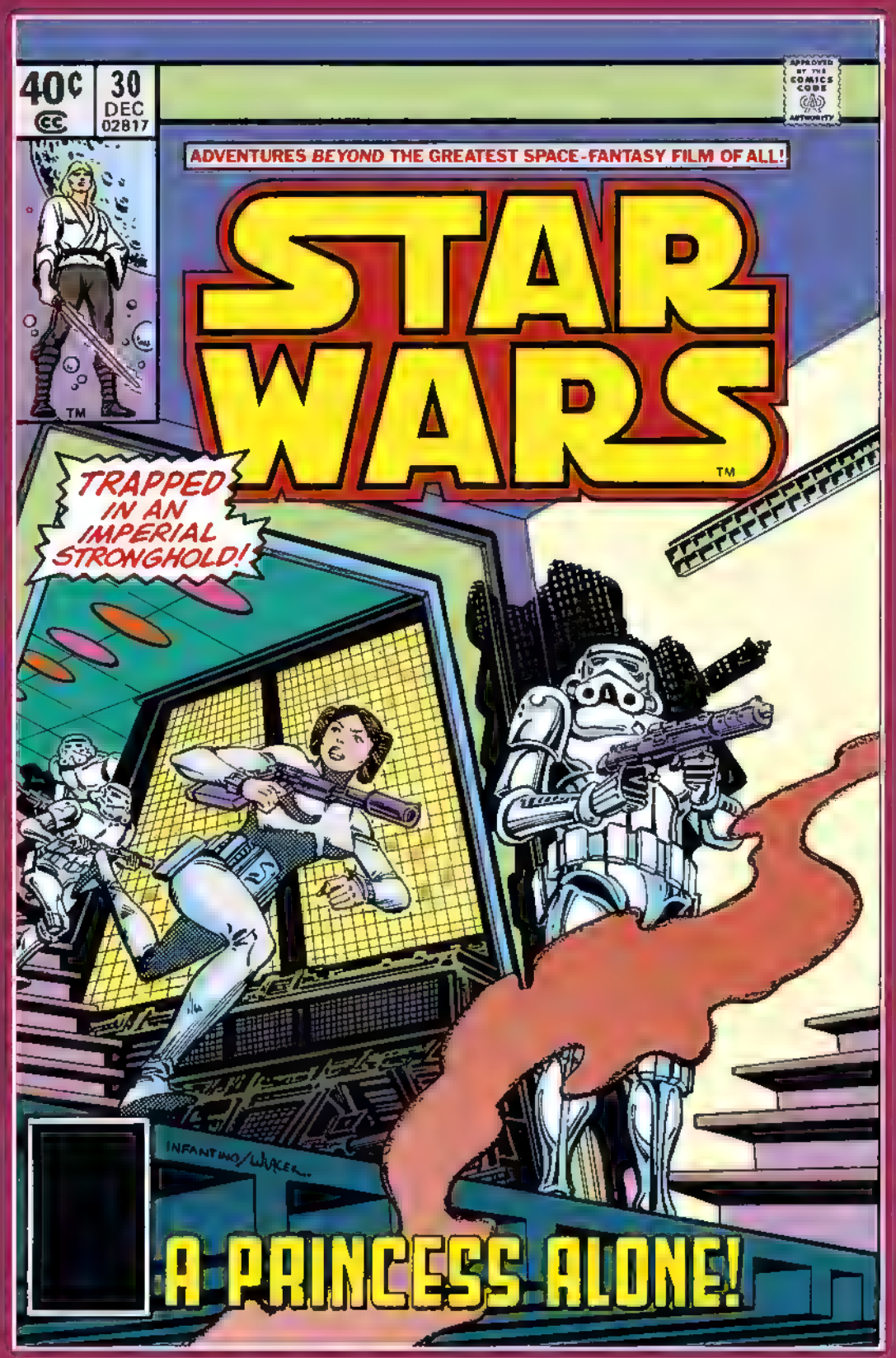
...AND MAKES HIS WAY BACK TO THE ORBITTING CRUISER.


FINALLY OFF-DUTY. I HATE THESE DOUBLE-SHIFTS.
RIGHT! CAN'T WAIT TO SHED THIS ARMOR. BEEN IN IT SO LONG I FEEL LIKE A BLASTED BORG--
--OR WORSE.

GET UNDER WAY AT ONCE, WERMIS. I'LL SUPPLY YOU WITH COORDINATES.
AND UNTIL I DECREE OTHERWISE..
--WE ARE ON ALERT STATUS. EVEN OFF-DUTY PERSONNEL WILL REMAIN IN FULL ARMOR!



NEXT ISSUE! A PRINCESS ALONE!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JOE ROSEN — LETTERER
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A PRINCESS ALONE!

THAT'S IT, YOUR HIGHNESS... METALORN!
JUST ONE IN HUNDREDS OF IMPERIAL FACTORY PLANETS.
HARDLY SEEMS THE KIND OF PLACE THE ALLIANCE SHOULD BE SENDING ITS BEST KNOWN LEADER.
PERHAPS, CAPTAIN, THAT'S THE REASON THEY DECIDED TO SEND ME
LG590

WELL, *STRATEGY'S* NOT MY DEPARTMENT, PRINCESS LEIA. LONG AS THIS OLD CARGO ORBITTER'S *CLEARANCES* DON'T GET CHECKED TOO CLOSELY--

--GETTING IN AND OUT SHOULDN'T BE A *PROBLEM.*

CAPTAIN--

--IS THAT A SUBTLE WAY OF HINTING THAT THE PROBLEM WILL BE WHILE I'M *THERE*?

DON'T YOU THINK I CAN *PASS* AS PART OF THE LOCAL *LABOR FORCE*?

WELL, IT'S NOT MUCH LIKE BEING A *SENATOR* OR A MEMBER OF THE *ROYAL HOUSE* OF ALDERAAN--

--BUT I GUESS *THAT'S* NOT MY DEPARTMENT, EITHER.

THERE'S A *CHANCE*, CAPTAIN, I MAY BE ABLE TO *BRING* SOMETHING HERE AN ORDINARY SPY COULDN'T.

ONE THING'S SURE, YOUR HIGHNESS. *WHATEVER* YOU'RE BRINGING--

THE SURFACE OF METALORN IS **CHAOS**. SHIFTING GREY ASH, BARREN ROCK, GREAT FIERY PITS OF MOLTEN SLAG. BUT BELOW THAT SURFACE IS **ORDER**. CLEAN, GLEAMING METAL, FILTERED AIR, UNENDING ARTIFICIAL LIGHT, AND THE DISCIPLINED HAND OF THE **EMPIRE**.

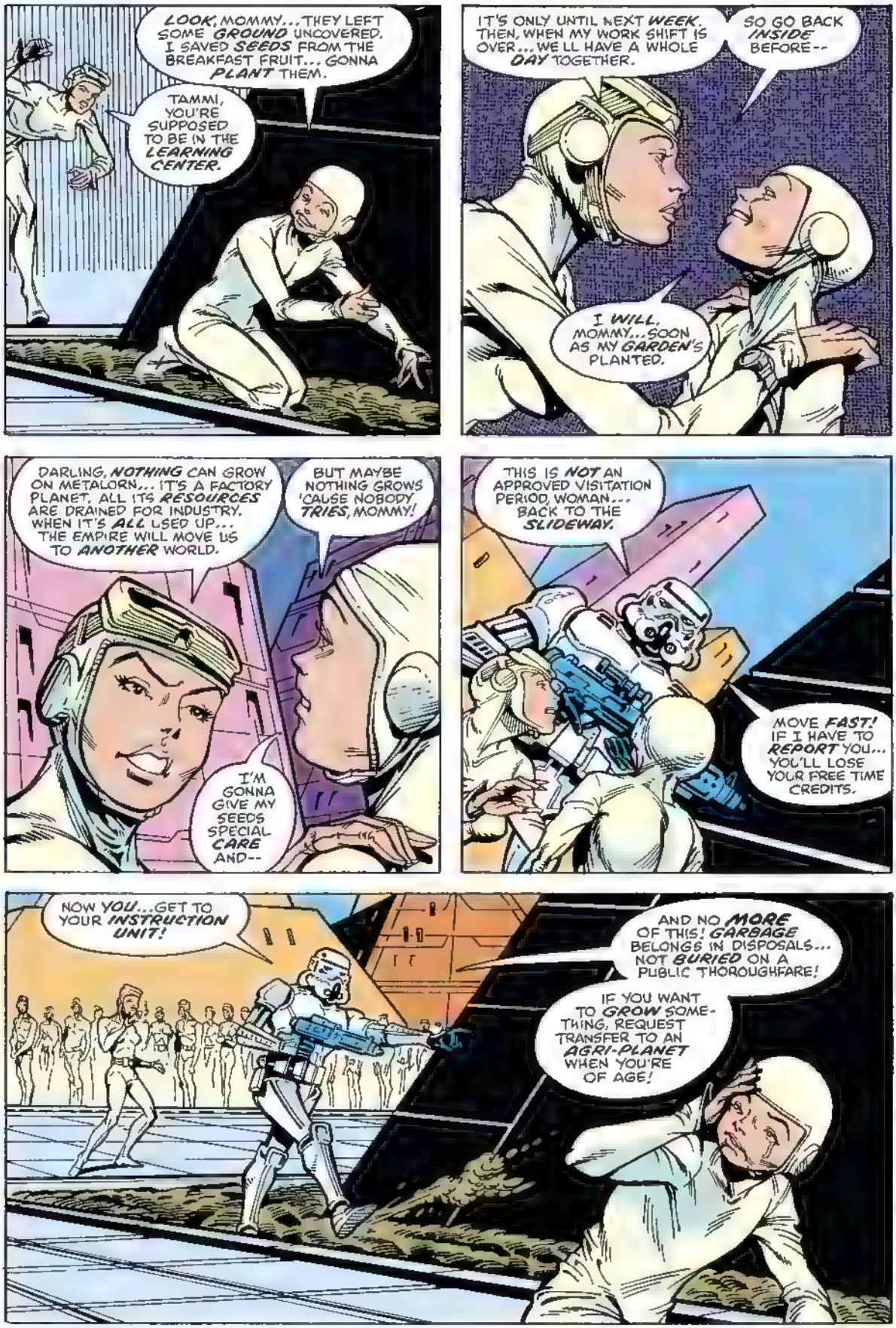
SHIFT 1146 IS NOW DISEMBARKING AT JUNCTION 206-994!

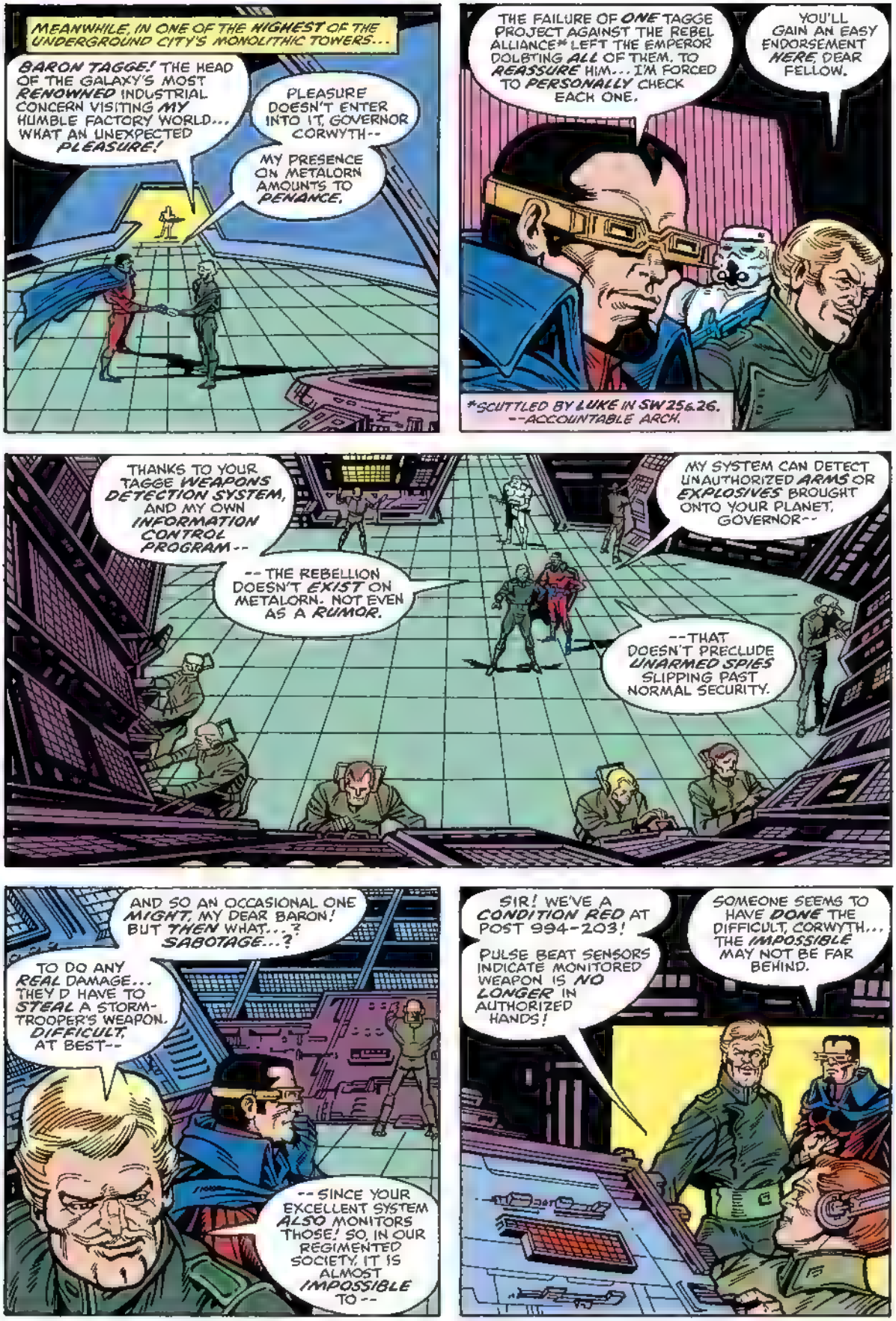
--ODDS ARE THESE POOR FOLKS DON'T *HAVE* IT.

YOU DOWN THERE! *WOMAN!* YOU'RE VIOLATING THE *WORK FORMATION!*

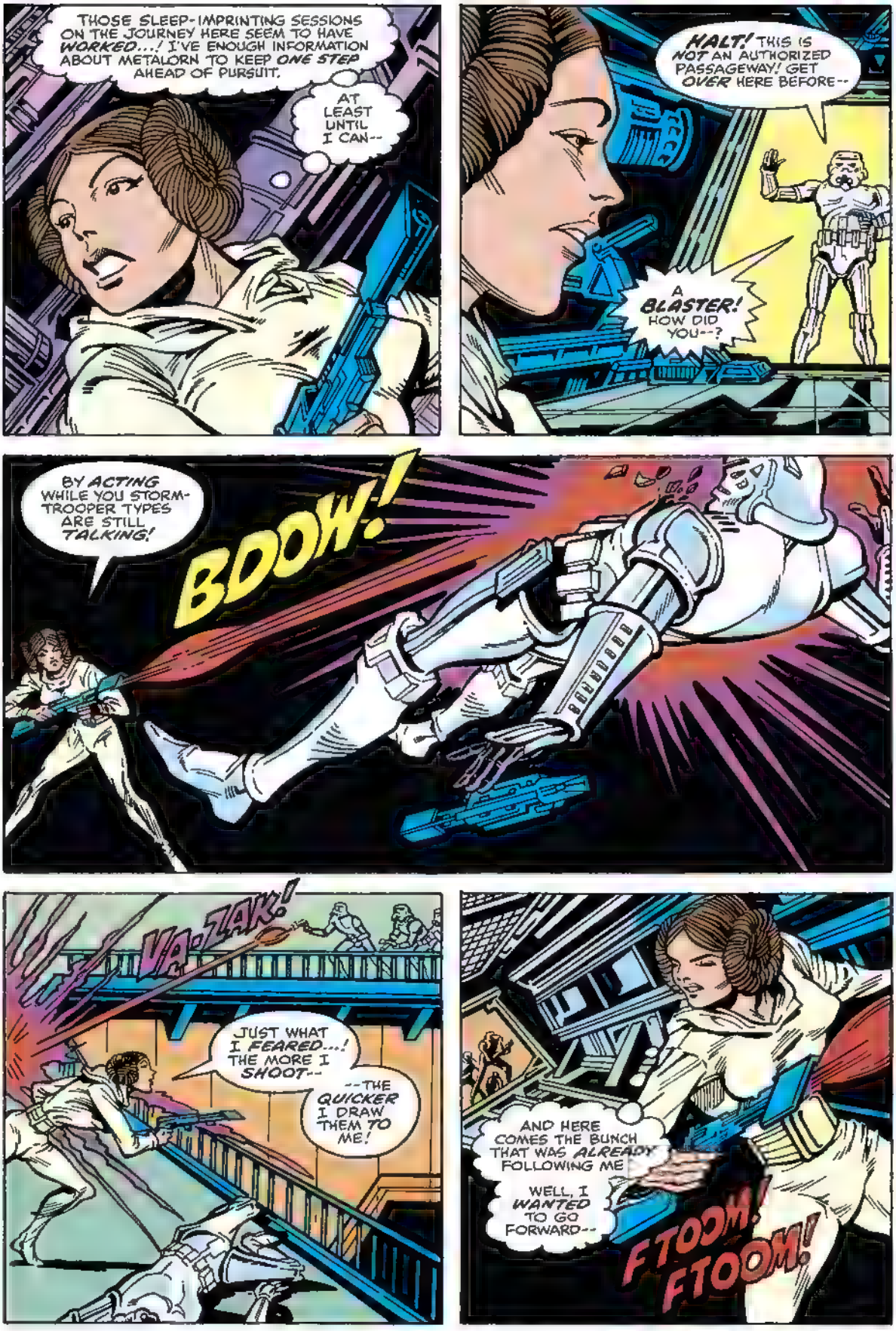
MAINTAIN YOUR RANK AND FILE ON THE *SLIDEWAY*... YOU'LL BE MOVING AGAIN *SHORTLY.*

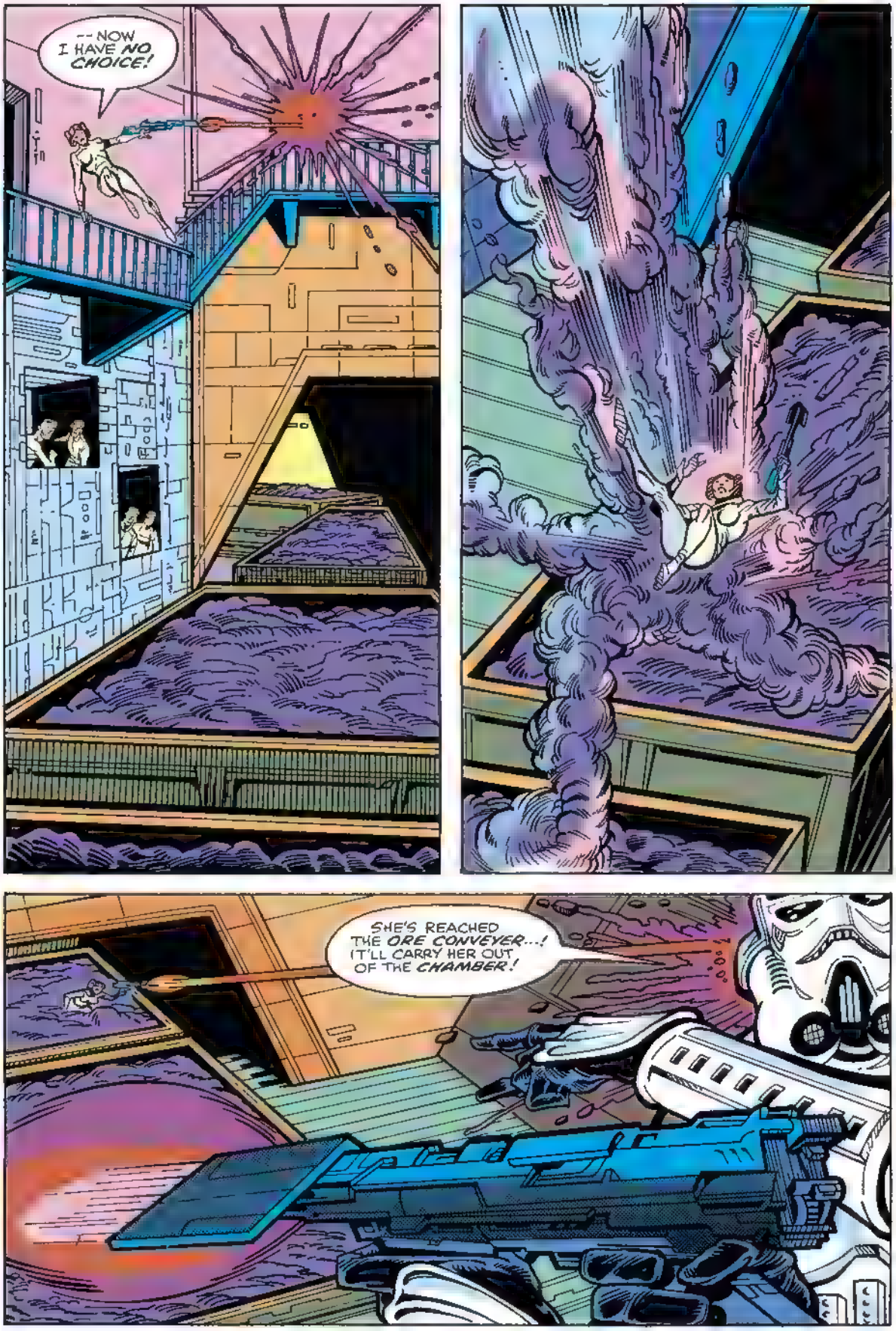
TAMMI! TAMMI! YOU SHOULDN'T BE *OUT* HERE!

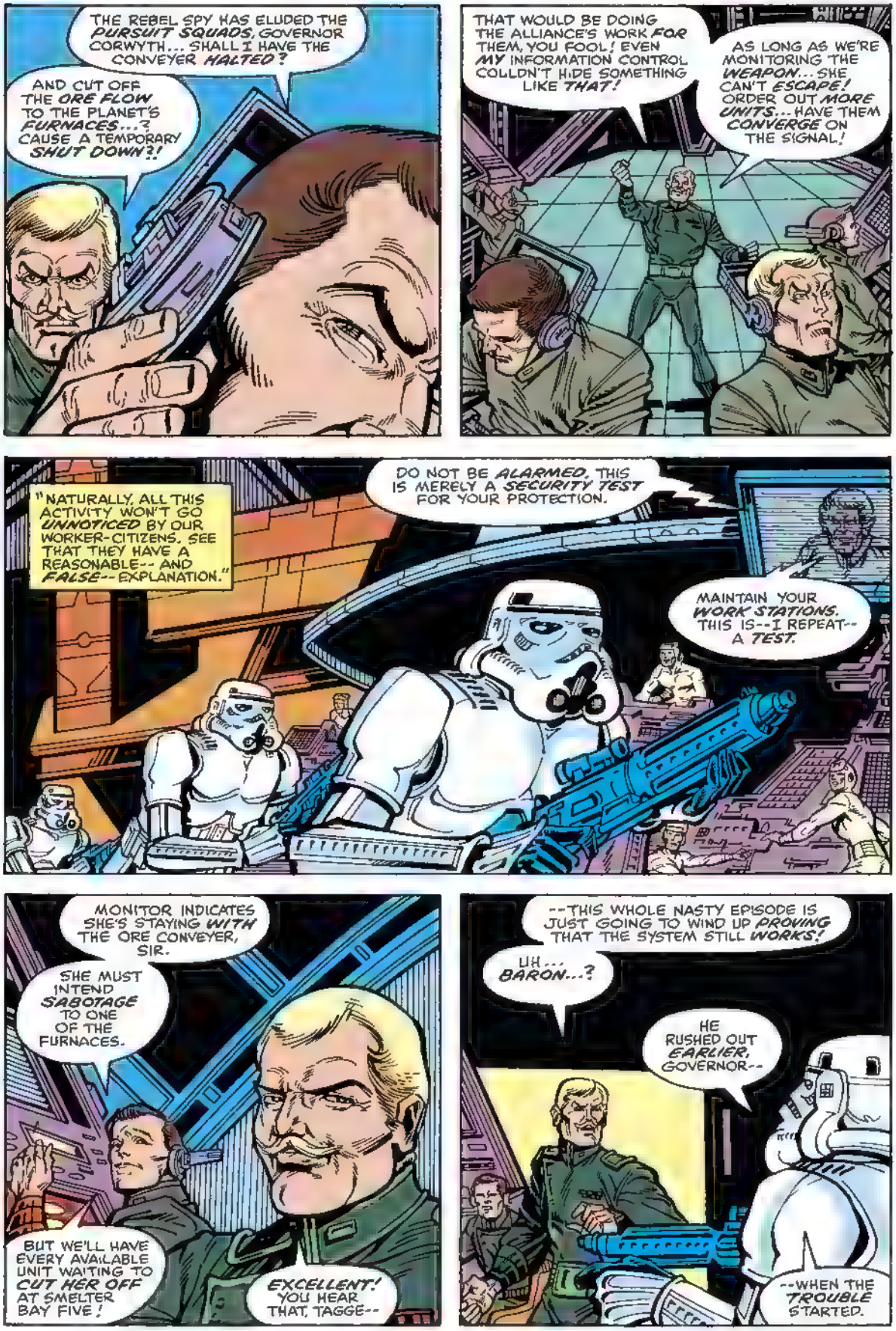

LOOK, MOMMY... THEY LEFT SOME GROUND UNCOVERED. I SAVED SEEDS FROM THE BREAKFAST FRUIT... GONNA PLANT THEM.
TAMMI, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE IN THE LEARNING CENTER.
IT'S ONLY UNTIL NEXT WEEK. THEN, WHEN MY WORK SHIFT IS OVER... WE'LL HAVE A WHOLE DAY TOGETHER.
SO GO BACK INSIDE BEFORE--
I WILL, MOMMY... SOON AS MY GARDEN'S PLANTED.
DARLING, NOTHING CAN GROW ON METALORN... IT'S A FACTORY PLANET. ALL ITS RESOURCES ARE DRAINED FOR INDUSTRY. WHEN IT'S ALL USED UP... THE EMPIRE WILL MOVE US TO ANOTHER WORLD.
BUT MAYBE NOTHING GROWS 'CAUSE NOBODY TRIES, MOMMY!
I'M GONNA GIVE MY SEEDS SPECIAL CARE AND--
THIS IS NOT AN APPROVED VISITATION PERIOD, WOMAN... BACK TO THE SLIDEWAY.
MOVE FAST! IF I HAVE TO REPORT YOU... YOU'LL LOSE YOUR FREE TIME CREDITS.
NOW YOU... GET TO YOUR INSTRUCTION UNIT!
AND NO MORE OF THIS! GARBAGE BELONGS IN DISPOSALS... NOT BURIED ON A PUBLIC THOROUGHFARE!
IF YOU WANT TO GROW SOMETHING, REQUEST TRANSFER TO AN AGRI-PLANET WHEN YOU'RE OF AGE!

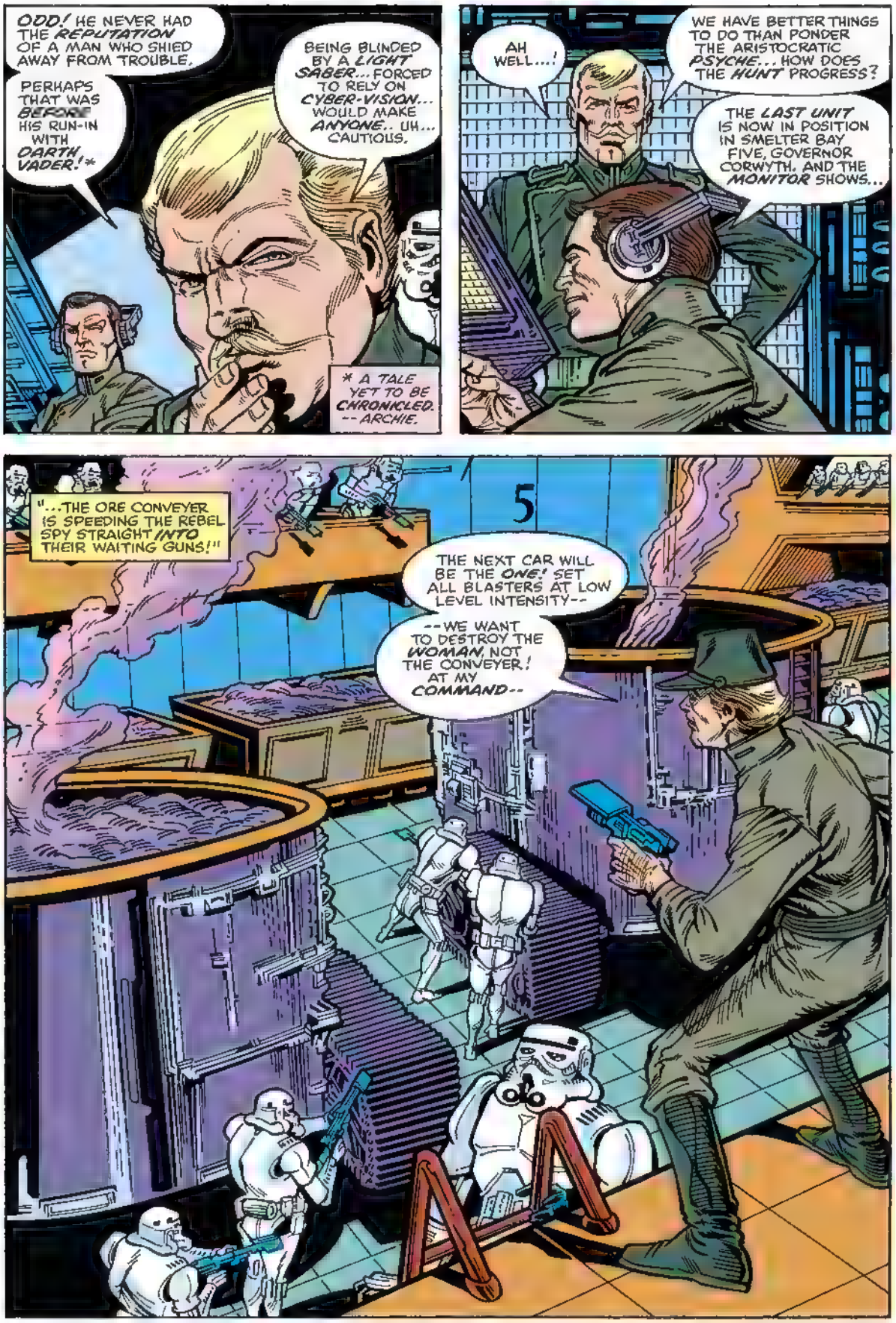

MEANWHILE, IN ONE OF THE HIGHEST OF THE UNDERGROUND CITY'S MONOLITHIC TOWERS...
BARON TAGGE! THE HEAD OF THE GALAXY'S MOST RENOWNED INDUSTRIAL CONCERN VISITING MY HUMBLE FACTORY WORLD... WHAT AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE!
PLEASURE DOESN'T ENTER INTO IT, GOVERNOR CORWYTH--
MY PRESENCE ON METALORN AMOUNTS TO PENANCE.
THE FAILURE OF ONE TAGGE PROJECT AGAINST THE REBEL ALLIANCE* LEFT THE EMPEROR DOUBTING ALL OF THEM. TO REASSURE HIM... I'M FORCED TO PERSONALLY CHECK EACH ONE.
YOU'LL GAIN AN EASY ENDORSEMENT HERE, DEAR FELLOW.
*SCUTTLED BY LUKE IN SW 25&26. --ACCOUNTABLE ARCH.
THANKS TO YOUR TAGGE WEAPONS DETECTION SYSTEM, AND MY OWN INFORMATION CONTROL PROGRAM--
-- THE REBELLION DOESN'T EXIST ON METALORN. NOT EVEN AS A RUMOR.
MY SYSTEM CAN DETECT UNAUTHORIZED ARMS OR EXPLOSIVES BROUGHT ONTO YOUR PLANET, GOVERNOR--
--THAT DOESN'T PRECLUDE UNARMED SPIES SLIPPING PAST NORMAL SECURITY.
AND SO AN OCCASIONAL ONE MIGHT, MY DEAR BARON! BUT THEN WHAT...? SABOTAGE...?
TO DO ANY REAL DAMAGE... THEY'D HAVE TO STEAL A STORM-TROOPER'S WEAPON. DIFFICULT, AT BEST--
-- SINCE YOUR EXCELLENT SYSTEM ALSO MONITORS THOSE! SO, IN OUR REGIMENTED SOCIETY, IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO --
SIR! WE'VE A CONDITION RED AT POST 994-203!
PULSE BEAT SENSORS INDICATE MONITORED WEAPON IS NO LONGER IN AUTHORIZED HANDS!
SOMEONE SEEMS TO HAVE DONE THE DIFFICULT, CORWYTH... THE IMPOSSIBLE MAY NOT BE FAR BEHIND.

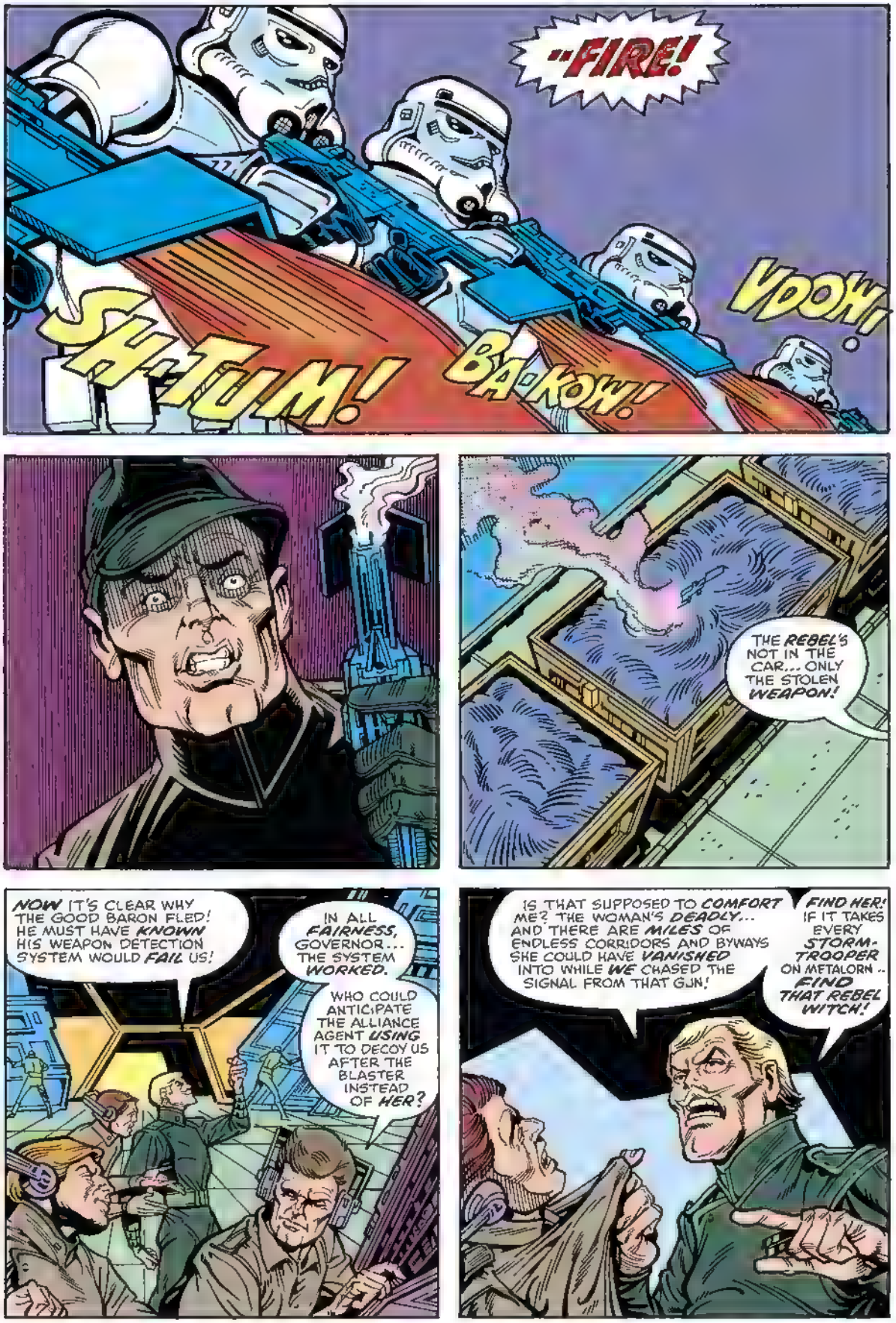
POST 994-203...
WE'VE FOUND THE TROOPER, MONITOR CONTROL.
PLAYBACK OF HIS RECORDING UNIT INDICATES HE STOPPED A LONE FEMALE COMING FROM THE DOCKING AREA FOR ROUTINE QUESTIONING.
HE WAS ABOUT TO CHECK AN IRREGULARITY ON HER PAPERS... WHEN SHE ATTACKED!
THE ASSAILANT WAS CLEVER...USED ADHESIVE SPRAY FROM A FIRST AID PACK TO CLOG THE VENTILATION SYSTEM OF OUR MAN'S ARMOR
THE REBELS ARE INSIDIOUS, BARON TAGGE! TURNING A HARMLESS ITEM INTO A WEAPON TO CIRCUMVENT YOUR DETECTION SYSTEM!
THE QUARRY HAS MOVED INTO THE SUB-LEVELS, GOVERNOR.
HEAVY EQUIPMENT THERE IS CAUSING FADE ON HER PULSEBEAT--
--BUT WE STILL HAVE A STRONG MONITOR FIX ON THE BLASTER ITSELF, SIR!
ALERT ALL THE MEN IT TAKES... FOLLOW THAT SIGNAL! INSTEAD OF ARMING HERSELF, OUR LITTLE SPY WILL FIND SHE'S TIED A NOOSE TO HER NECK!
"AND THE FURTHER AND FASTER SHE RUNS...
"...THE TIGHTER IT'S GOING TO GET!"

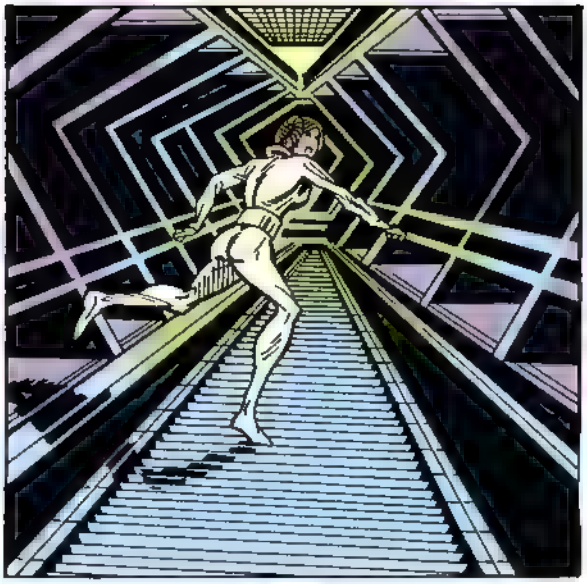

THOSE SLEEP-IMPRINTING SESSIONS ON THE JOURNEY HERE SEEM TO HAVE WORKED...! I'VE ENOUGH INFORMATION ABOUT METALORN TO KEEP ONE STEP AHEAD OF PURSUIT.
AT LEAST UNTIL I CAN--
HALT! THIS IS NOT AN AUTHORIZED PASSAGEWAY! GET OVER HERE BEFORE--
A BLASTER! HOW DID YOU--?
BY ACTING WHILE YOU STORM-TROOPER TYPES ARE STILL TALKING!
BDOW!
VA-ZAK!
JUST WHAT I FEARED...! THE MORE I SHOOT--
--THE QUICKER I DRAW THEM TO ME!
AND HERE COMES THE BUNCH THAT WAS ALREADY FOLLOWING ME
WELL, I WANTED TO GO FORWARD--
FTOOM! FTOOM!

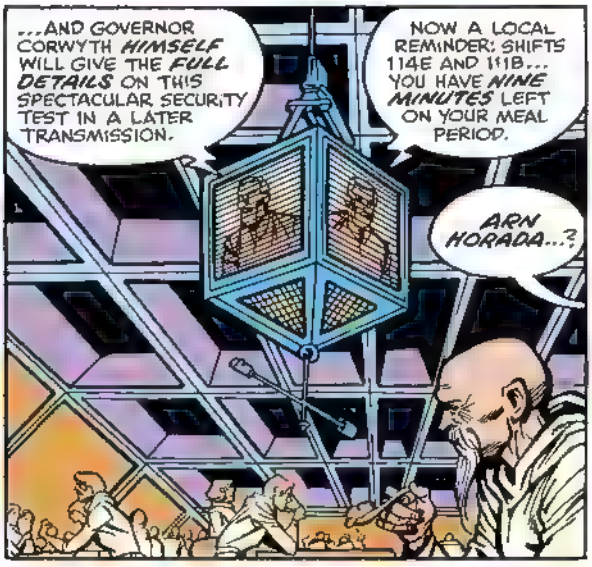

-- NOW I HAVE NO CHOICE!
SHE'S REACHED THE ORE CONVEYER...! IT'LL CARRY HER OUT OF THE CHAMBER!

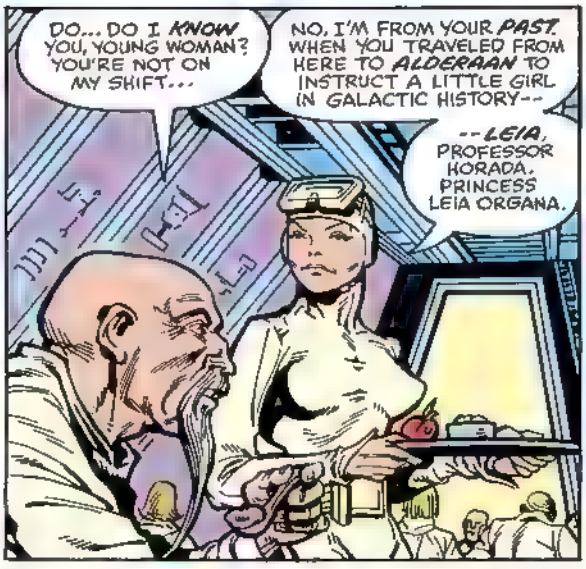

THE REBEL SPY HAS ELUDED THE PURSUIT SQUADS, GOVERNOR CORWYTH... SHALL I HAVE THE CONVEYER HALTED?
AND CUT OFF THE ORE FLOW TO THE PLANET'S FURNACES...? CAUSE A TEMPORARY SHUT DOWN?!
THAT WOULD BE DOING THE ALLIANCE'S WORK FOR THEM, YOU FOOL! EVEN MY INFORMATION CONTROL COULDN'T HIDE SOMETHING LIKE THAT!
AS LONG AS WE'RE MONITORING THE WEAPON... SHE CAN'T ESCAPE! ORDER OUT MORE UNITS... HAVE THEM CONVERGE ON THE SIGNAL!
"NATURALLY, ALL THIS ACTIVITY WON'T GO UNNOTICED BY OUR WORKER-CITIZENS. SEE THAT THEY HAVE A REASONABLE-- AND FALSE-- EXPLANATION."
DO NOT BE ALARMED. THIS IS MERELY A SECURITY TEST FOR YOUR PROTECTION.
MAINTAIN YOUR WORK STATIONS. THIS IS--I REPEAT-- A TEST.
MONITOR INDICATES SHE'S STAYING WITH THE ORE CONVEYER, SIR.
SHE MUST INTEND SABOTAGE TO ONE OF THE FURNACES.
BUT WE'LL HAVE EVERY AVAILABLE UNIT WAITING TO CUT HER OFF AT SMELTER BAY FIVE!
EXCELLENT! YOU HEAR THAT, TAGGE--
--THIS WHOLE NASTY EPISODE IS JUST GOING TO WIND UP PROVING THAT THE SYSTEM STILL WORKS!
UH... BARON...?
HE RUSHED OUT EARLIER, GOVERNOR--
--WHEN THE TROUBLE STARTED.


ODD! HE NEVER HAD THE REPUTATION OF A MAN WHO SHIED AWAY FROM TROUBLE.
PERHAPS THAT WAS BEFORE HIS RUN-IN WITH DARTH VADER!*
BEING BLINDED BY A LIGHT SABER... FORCED TO RELY ON CYBER-VISION... WOULD MAKE ANYONE.. UH... CAUTIOUS.
* A TALE YET TO BE CHRONICLED. --ARCHIE.
AH WELL...!
WE HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN PONDER THE ARISTOCRATIC PSYCHE... HOW DOES THE HUNT PROGRESS?
THE LAST UNIT IS NOW IN POSITION IN SMELTER BAY FIVE, GOVERNOR CORWYTH. AND THE MONITOR SHOWS...
5
"...THE ORE CONVEYER IS SPEEDING THE REBEL SPY STRAIGHT INTO THEIR WAITING GUNS!"
THE NEXT CAR WILL BE THE ONE! SET ALL BLASTERS AT LOW LEVEL INTENSITY--
--WE WANT TO DESTROY THE WOMAN, NOT THE CONVEYER! AT MY COMMAND--


"FIRE!
SH-TUM!
BA-KOW!
VDOH!
THE REBEL'S NOT IN THE CAR... ONLY THE STOLEN WEAPON!
NOW IT'S CLEAR WHY THE GOOD BARON FLED! HE MUST HAVE KNOWN HIS WEAPON DETECTION SYSTEM WOULD FAIL US!
IN ALL FAIRNESS, GOVERNOR... THE SYSTEM WORKED.
WHO COULD ANTICIPATE THE ALLIANCE AGENT USING IT TO DECOY US AFTER THE BLASTER INSTEAD OF HER?
IS THAT SUPPOSED TO COMFORT ME? THE WOMAN'S DEADLY... AND THERE ARE MILES OF ENDLESS CORRIDORS AND BYWAYS SHE COULD HAVE VANISHED INTO WHILE WE CHASED THE SIGNAL FROM THAT GUN!
FIND HER! IF IT TAKES EVERY STORM-TROOPER ON METALORN - FIND THAT REBEL WITCH!

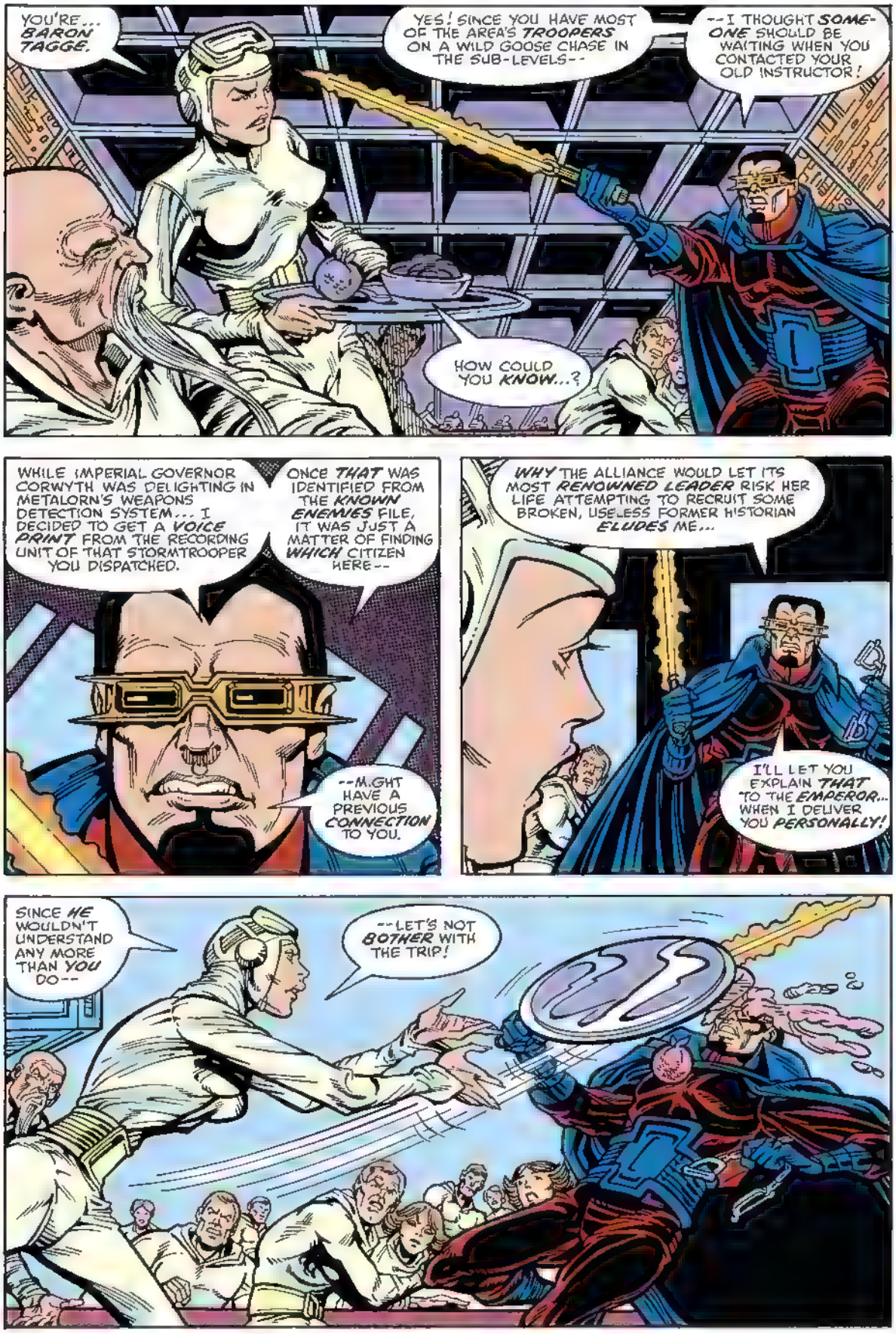


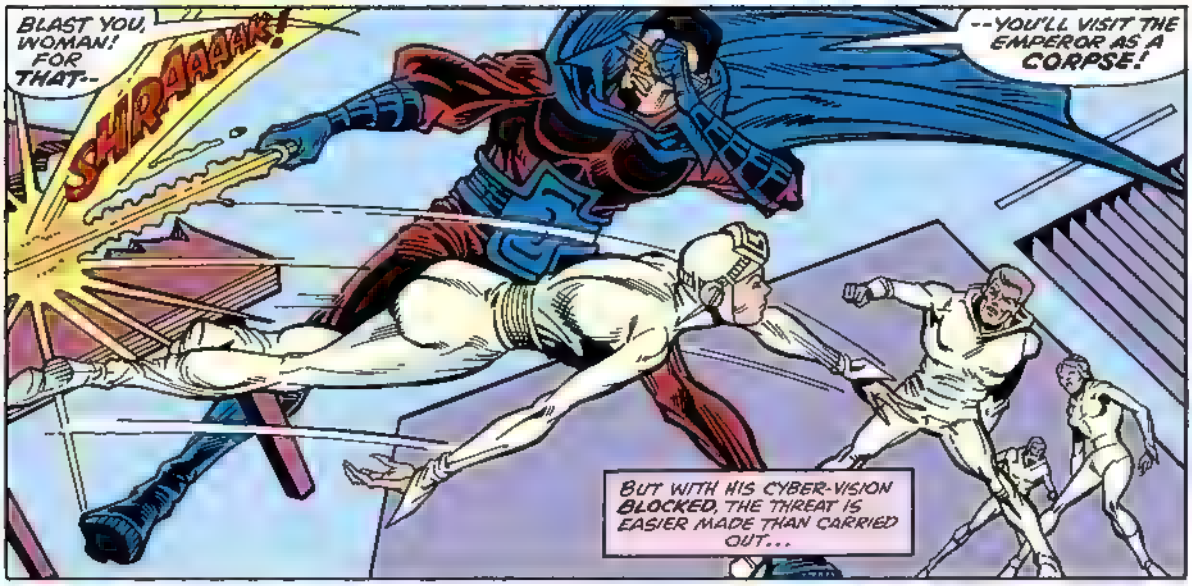

...AND GOVERNOR CORWYTH HIMSELF WILL GIVE THE FULL DETAILS ON THIS SPECTACULAR SECURITY TEST IN A LATER TRANSMISSION.
NOW A LOCAL REMINDER: SHIFTS 114E AND 111B... YOU HAVE NINE MINUTES LEFT ON YOUR MEAL PERIOD.
ARN HORADA...?

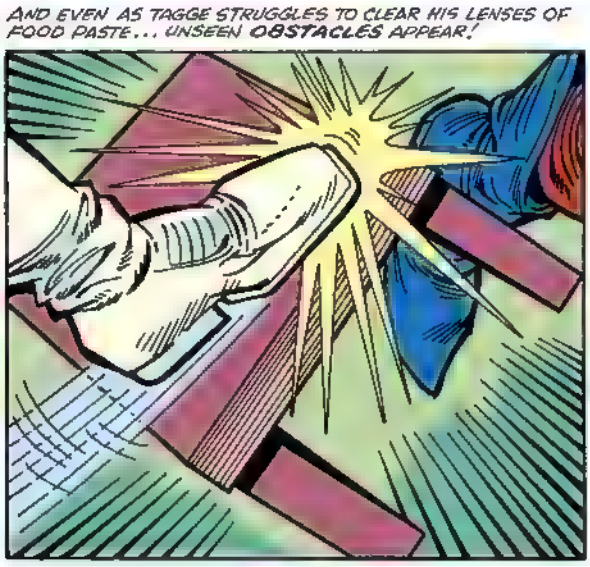

DO... DO I KNOW YOU, YOUNG WOMAN? YOU'RE NOT ON MY SHIFT...
NO, I'M FROM YOUR PAST. WHEN YOU TRAVELED FROM HERE TO ALDERAAN TO INSTRUCT A LITTLE GIRL IN GALACTIC HISTORY--
--LEIA, PROFESSOR HORADA. PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA.

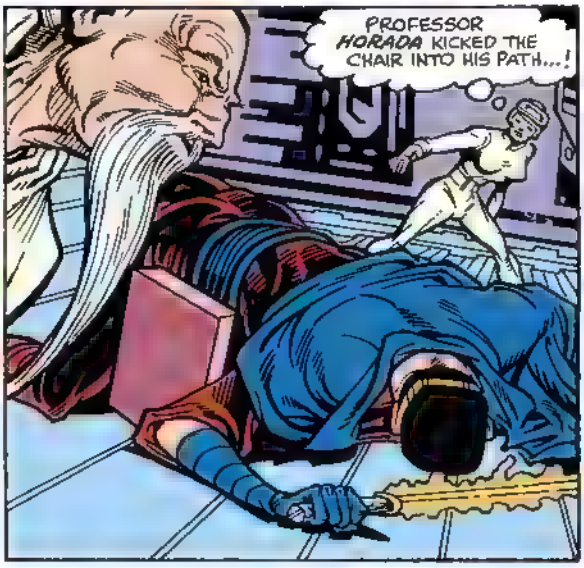
N-NO...! ARE YOU TRYING TO GET ME IN TROUBLE...? ALDERAAN IS DESTROYED... OBLITERATED BY A METEOR STORM...!
CENTRAL INFORMATION TOLD US THAT LONG AGO...! NONE OF THE ROYAL HOUSE SURVIVED... NONE!
THEY LIED TO YOU, PROFESSOR... I'M HERE TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH.

AND TO ENLIST HIM IN BRINGING THE REBELLION TO METALORN, PRINCESS...?


YOU'RE... BARON TAGGE.
YES! SINCE YOU HAVE MOST OF THE AREA'S TROOPERS ON A WILD GOOSE CHASE IN THE SUB-LEVELS--
--I THOUGHT SOMEONE SHOULD BE WAITING WHEN YOU CONTACTED YOUR OLD INSTRUCTOR!
HOW COULD YOU KNOW...?
WHILE IMPERIAL GOVERNOR CORWYTH WAS DELIGHTING IN METALORN'S WEAPONS DETECTION SYSTEM... I DECIDED TO GET A VOICE PRINT FROM THE RECORDING UNIT OF THAT STORMTROOPER YOU DISPATCHED.
ONCE THAT WAS IDENTIFIED FROM THE KNOWN ENEMIES FILE, IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF FINDING WHICH CITIZEN HERE--
--MIGHT HAVE A PREVIOUS CONNECTION TO YOU.
WHY THE ALLIANCE WOULD LET ITS MOST RENOWNED LEADER RISK HER LIFE ATTEMPTING TO RECRUIT SOME BROKEN, USELESS FORMER HISTORIAN ELUDES ME...
I'LL LET YOU EXPLAIN THAT TO THE EMPEROR... WHEN I DELIVER YOU PERSONALLY!
SINCE HE WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND ANY MORE THAN YOU DO--
--LET'S NOT BOTHER WITH THE TRIP!


BLAST YOU, WOMAN! FOR THAT--
SHRAAAAK!
--YOU'LL VISIT THE EMPEROR AS A CORPSE!
BUT WITH HIS CYBER-VISION BLOCKED, THE THREAT IS EASIER MADE THAN CARRIED OUT...


AND EVEN AS TAGGE STRUGGLES TO CLEAR HIS LENSES OF FOOD PASTE... UNSEEN OBSTACLES APPEAR!

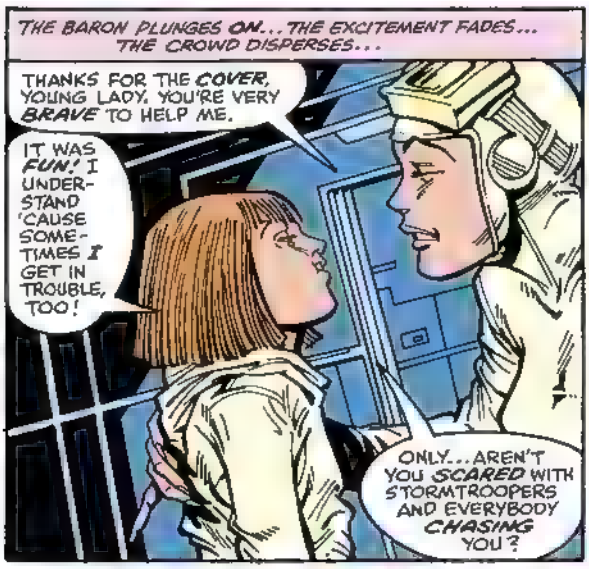

PROFESSOR HORADA KICKED THE CHAIR INTO HIS PATH...!

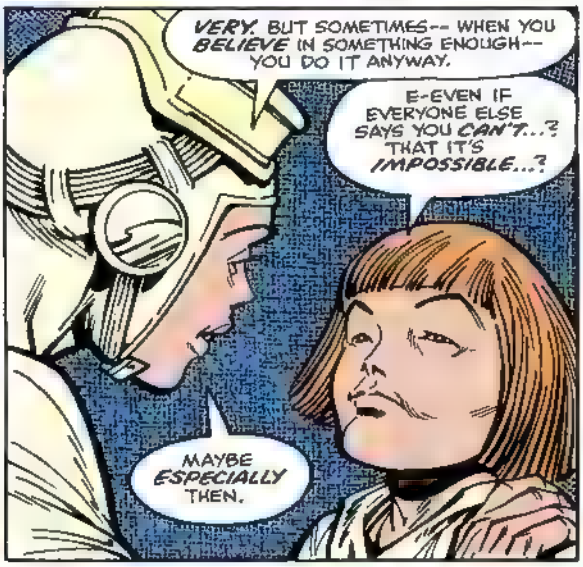
GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY, THE PRINCESS MOVES SWIFTLY TO CAPITALIZE ON IT...
...USING THE ENERGY SHACKLES MEANT FOR HER!
KLIK!

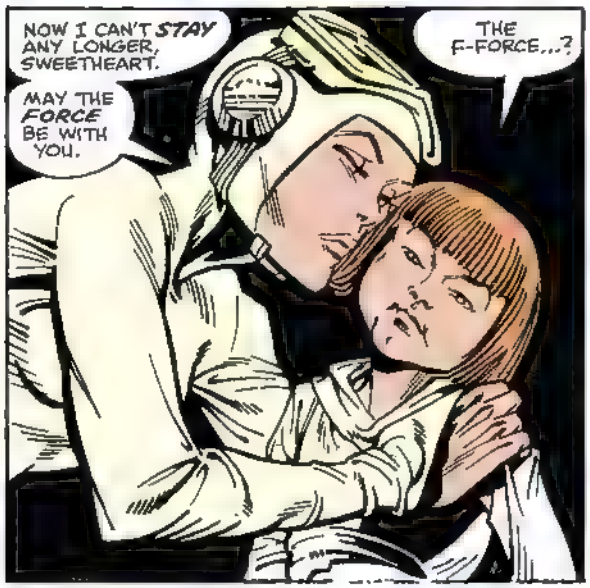
DON'T STAND LIKE UNPROGRAMMED DROIDS! AN ENEMY OF THE EMPEROR IS ESCAPING!
B-BUT... THE EMPEROR HAS NO ENEMIES...! THE DAILY INFORMATION BROADCASTS ASSURE US OF THIS...!

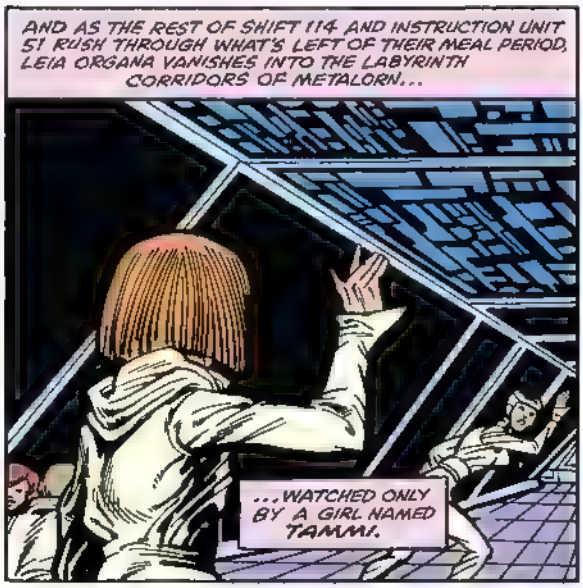
AND MATTERS OF DISOBEDIENCE ARE ONLY TO BE SETTLED BY IMPERIAL TROOPERS...!
ALREADY CHASING THAT WITCH.... DOWN A FALSE TRAIL!
YES! WHERE ARE THE STORM-TROOPERS...?!
VRAM!!

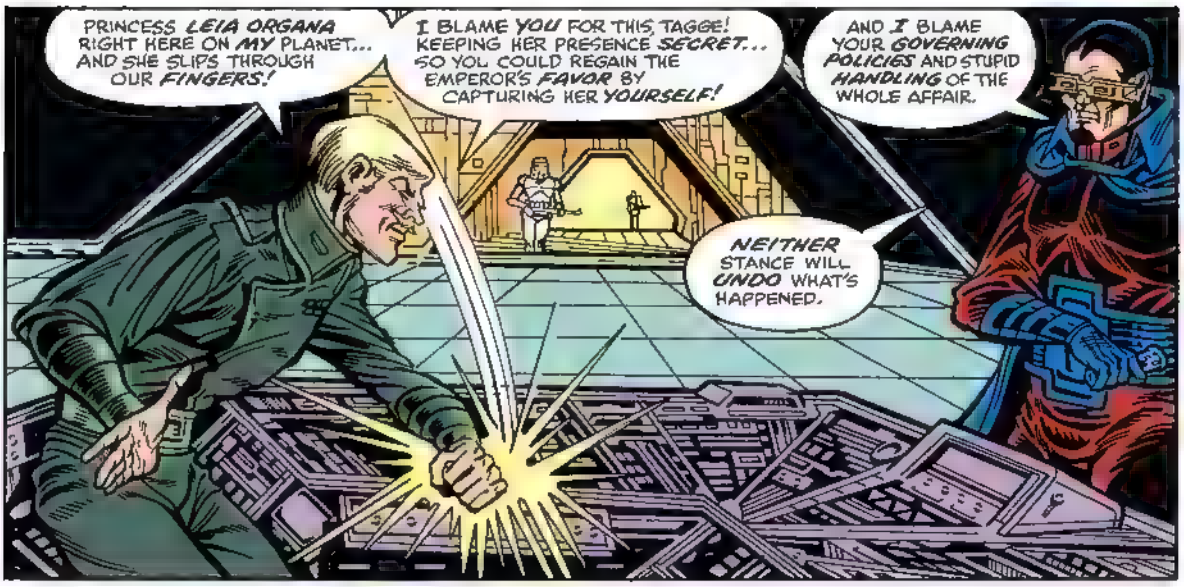
MOVE, YOU MISINFORMED DOLTS! CLEAR MY WAY TO THE NEAREST EXIT... THAT'S WHERE SHE WAS HEADED!

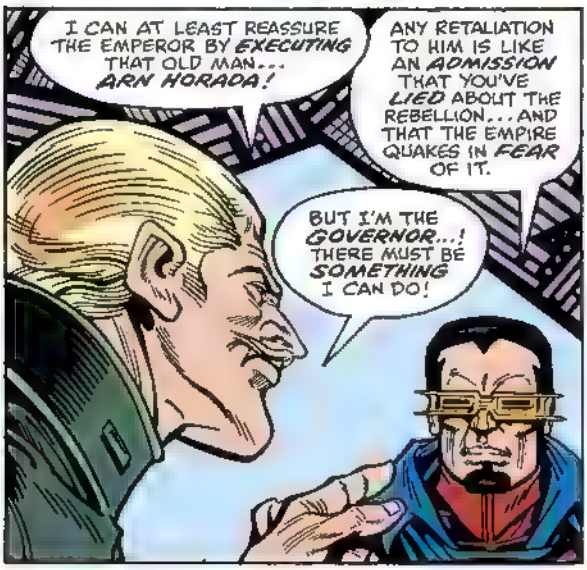

THE BARON PLUNGES ON... THE EXCITEMENT FADES... THE CROWD DISPERSES...
THANKS FOR THE COVER, YOUNG LADY. YOU'RE VERY BRAVE TO HELP ME.
IT WAS FUN! I UNDERSTAND 'CAUSE SOMETIMES I GET IN TROUBLE, TOO!
ONLY... AREN'T YOU SCARED WITH STORMTROOPERS AND EVERYBODY CHASING YOU?

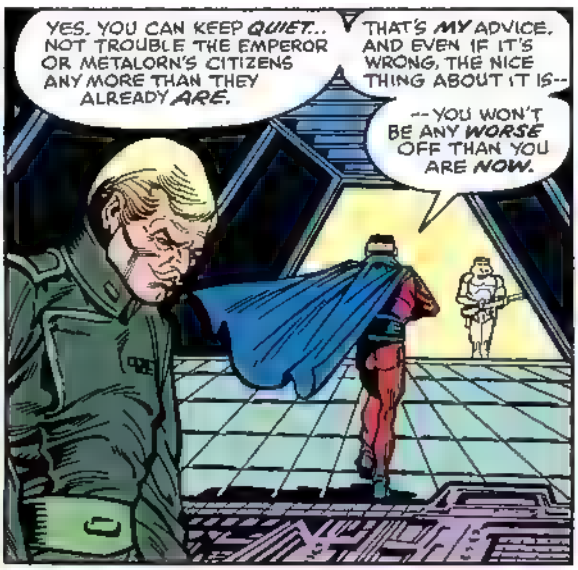

VERY. BUT SOMETIMES-- WHEN YOU BELIEVE IN SOMETHING ENOUGH-- YOU DO IT ANYWAY.
E-EVEN IF EVERYONE ELSE SAYS YOU CAN'T...? THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE...?
MAYBE ESPECIALLY THEN.

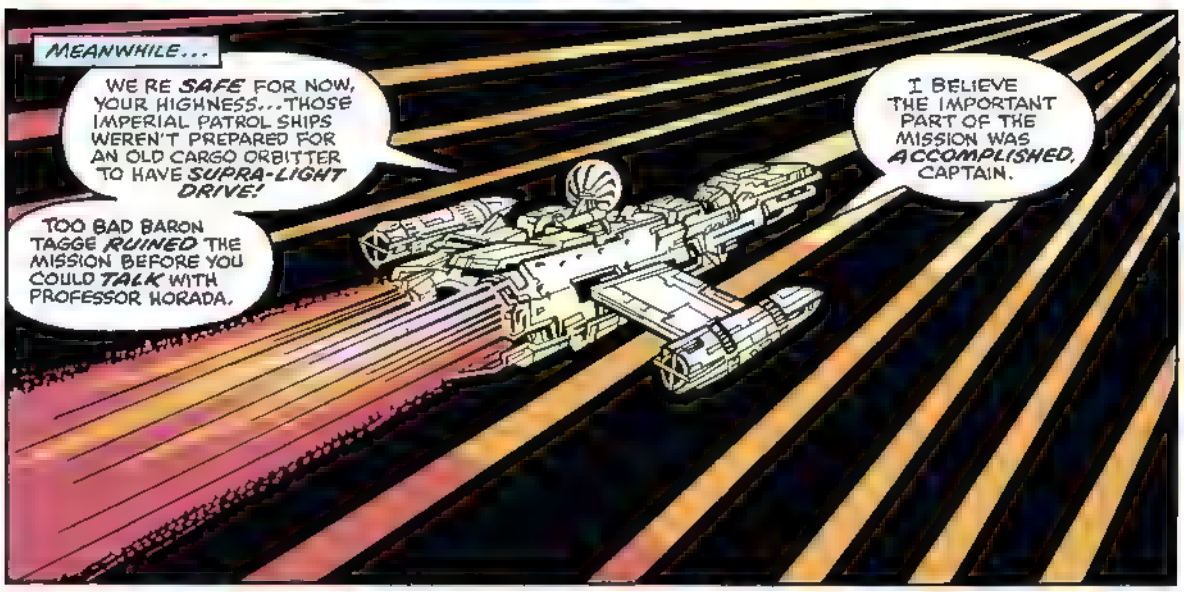

NOW I CAN'T STAY ANY LONGER, SWEETHEART.
MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU.
THE F-FORCE...?


AND AS THE REST OF SHIFT 114 AND INSTRUCTION UNIT 51 RUSH THROUGH WHAT'S LEFT OF THEIR MEAL PERIOD, LEIA ORGANA VANISHES INTO THE LABYRINTH CORRIDORS OF METALORN...
...WATCHED ONLY BY A GIRL NAMED TAMMI.

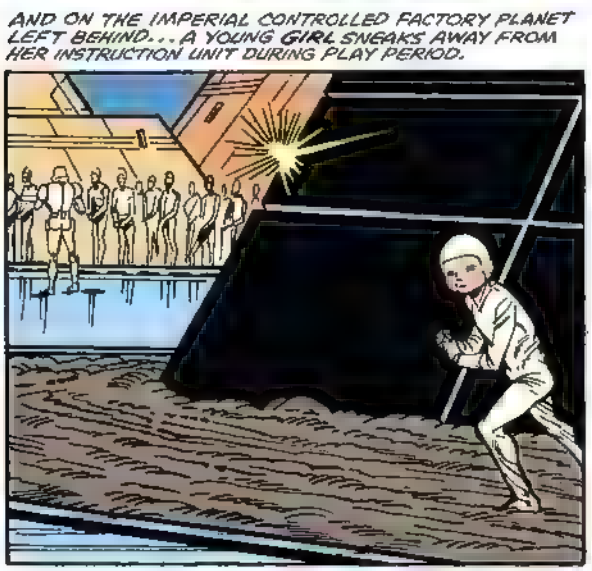

PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA RIGHT HERE ON MY PLANET... AND SHE SLIPS THROUGH OUR FINGERS!
I BLAME YOU FOR THIS, TAGGE! KEEPING HER PRESENCE SECRET... SO YOU COULD REGAIN THE EMPEROR'S FAVOR BY CAPTURING HER YOURSELF!
AND I BLAME YOUR GOVERNING POLICIES AND STUPID HANDLING OF THE WHOLE AFFAIR.
NEITHER STANCE WILL UNDO WHAT'S HAPPENED.

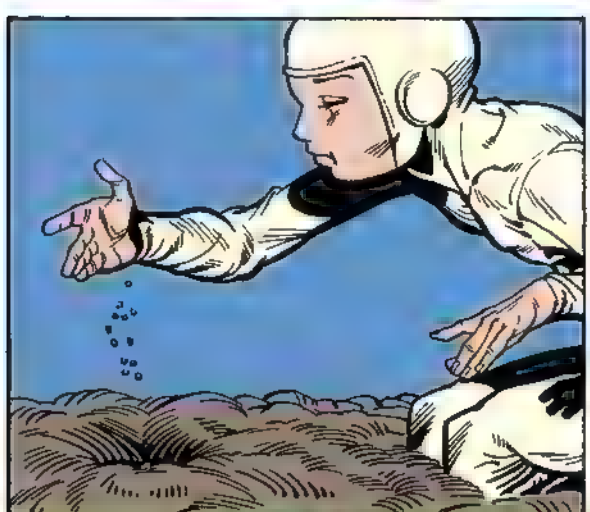

I CAN AT LEAST REASSURE THE EMPEROR BY EXECUTING THAT OLD MAN... ARN HORADA!
ANY RETALIATION TO HIM IS LIKE AN ADMISSION THAT YOU'VE LIED ABOUT THE REBELLION... AND THAT THE EMPIRE QUAKES IN FEAR OF IT.
BUT I'M THE GOVERNOR...! THERE MUST BE SOMETHING I CAN DO!

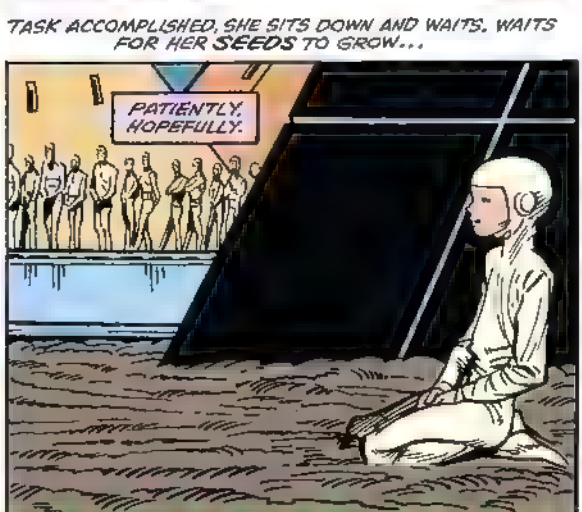

YES. YOU CAN KEEP QUIET.. NOT TROUBLE THE EMPEROR OR METALORN'S CITIZENS ANY MORE THAN THEY ALREADY ARE.
THAT'S MY ADVICE. AND EVEN IF IT'S WRONG, THE NICE THING ABOUT IT IS--
--YOU WON'T BE ANY WORSE OFF THAN YOU ARE NOW.


MEANWHILE...
WE RE SAFE FOR NOW, YOUR HIGHNESS...THOSE IMPERIAL PATROL SHIPS WEREN'T PREPARED FOR AN OLD CARGO ORBITTER TO HAVE SUPRA-LIGHT DRIVE!
TOO BAD BARON TAGGE RUINED THE MISSION BEFORE YOU COULD TALK WITH PROFESSOR HORADA.
I BELIEVE THE IMPORTANT PART OF THE MISSION WAS ACCOMPLISHED, CAPTAIN.

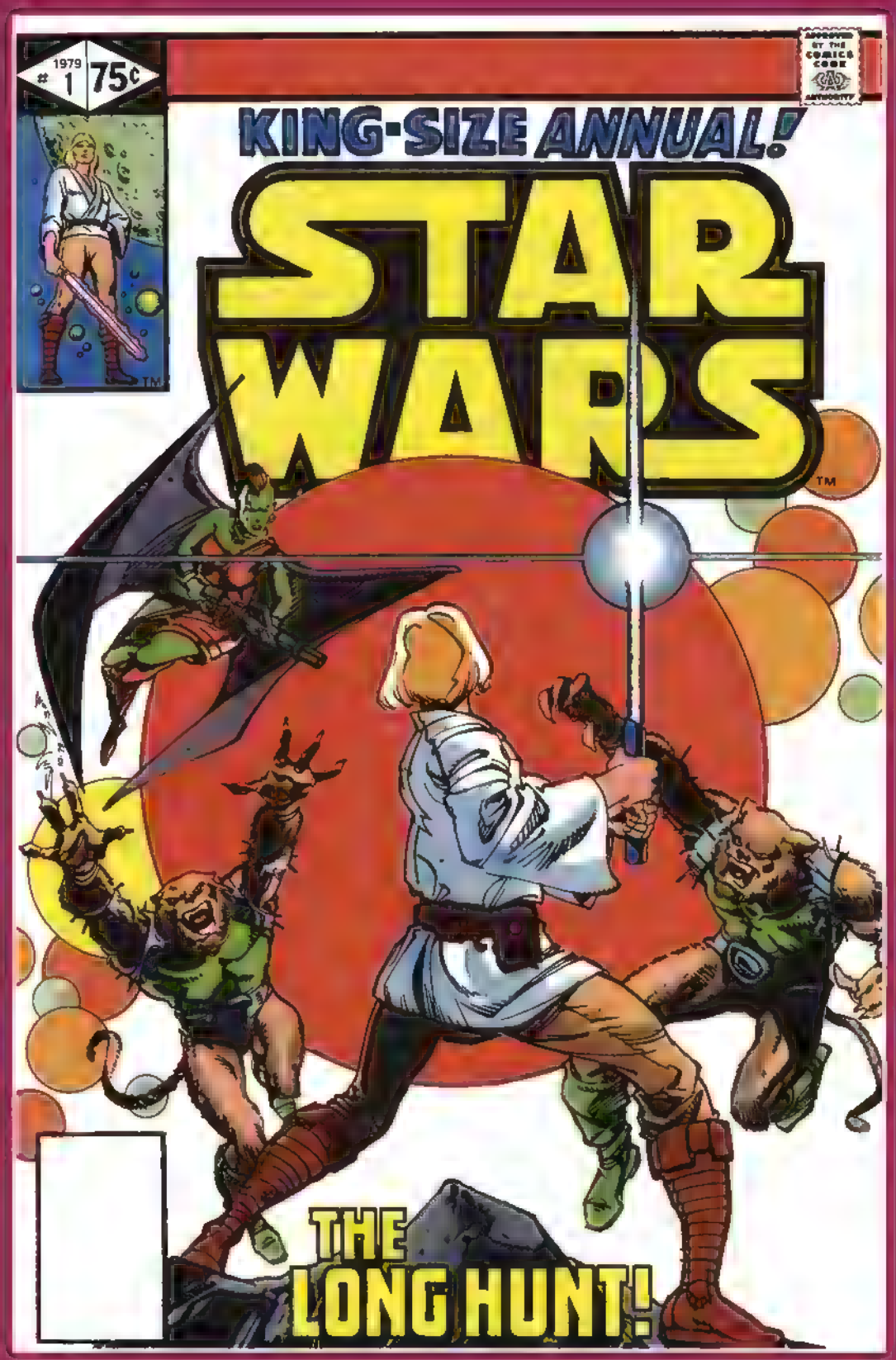
WITH ALL RESPECT, PRINCESS LEIA... HOW? NOTHING WAS SABOTAGED... NO RESISTANCE FORCE ESTABLISHED.
WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT METALORN NOW THAN BEFORE WE ARRIVED?
YOU'RE MAKING THE SAME MISTAKE THE EMPIRE DOES, CAPTAIN. THERE'S MORE TO THE REBELLION THAN GUERILLA WARFARE.
A TEACHER, A HISTORIAN, LIKE ARN HORADA CAN EVENTUALLY LEAD A RESISTANCE WHEN IT'S SAFE. NOT TO FIGHT... BUT TO POUR SAND IN THE IMPERIAL WAR MACHINE.
BUT FIRST... HE AND OTHERS THERE NEEDED TO BE SHOWN THERE WAS A REBELLION... TO SEE THAT ITS LEADERS SURVIVE AND CONTINUE THE FIGHT...
TO GIVE METALORN WHAT IT'S BEEN LACKING BEFORE--
A BLASTER ISN'T CONSTRUCTED RIGHT... TRANSCEIVER SETS GET FAULTY PARTS.
--HOPE.


AND ON THE IMPERIAL CONTROLLED FACTORY PLANET LEFT BEHIND... A YOUNG GIRL SNEAKS AWAY FROM HER INSTRUCTION UNIT DURING PLAY PERIOD.





NEXT: RETURN TO TATOOINE!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STAR WARS
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THE LONG HUNT!

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THE LONG HUNT

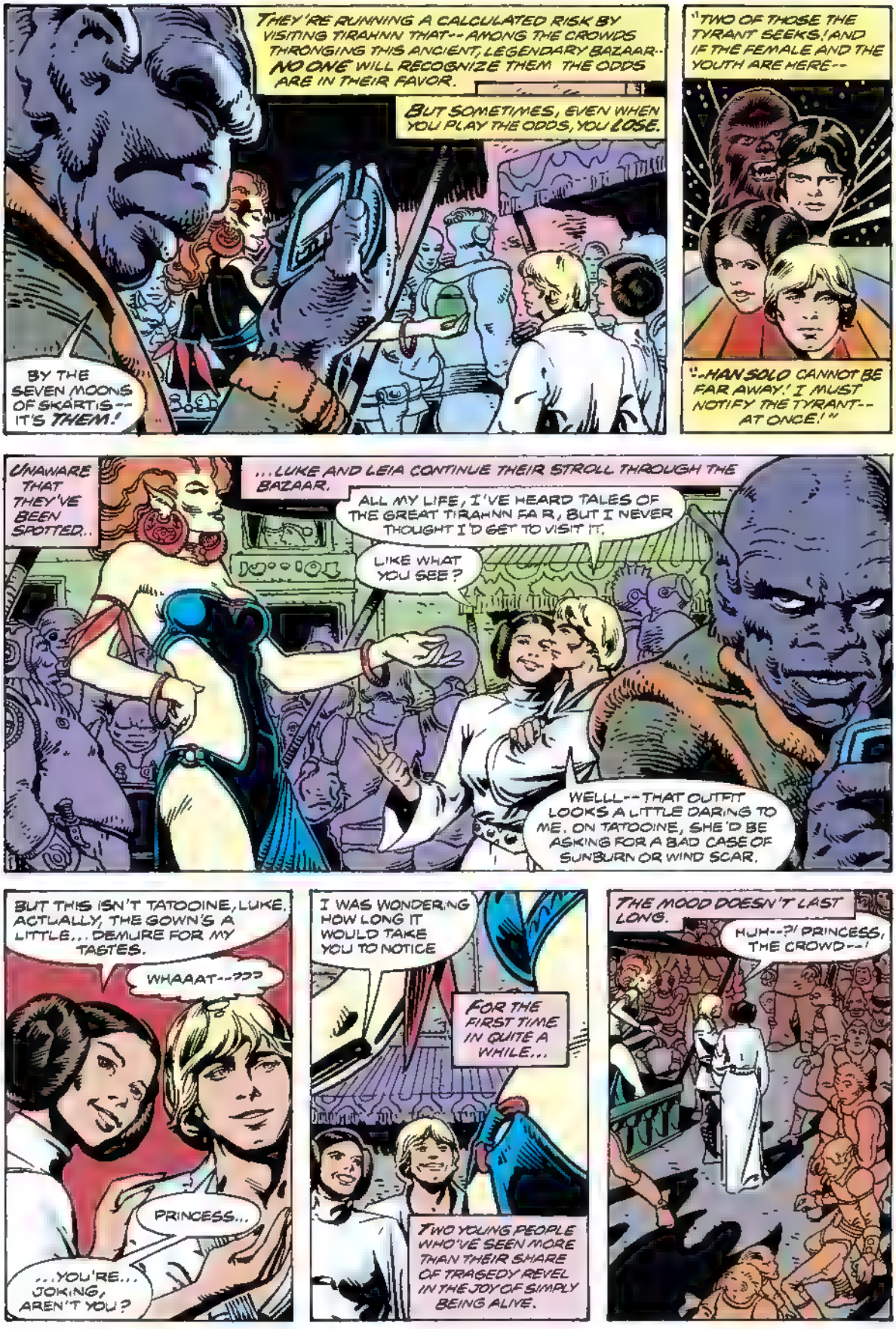
AS THE SAYING GOES, IT'S A **BIG** EMPIRE--STRETCHING FROM ONE SPIRAL ARM OF THE GALAXY TO THE OTHER, ENCOMPASSING MILLIONS OF STAR SYSTEMS, THOUSANDS OF INHABITED WORLDS.

IN ALL THAT VAST AMOUNT OF SPACE, AMONG ALL THOSE COUNTLESS BILLIONS OF SAPIENT BEINGS, IT'S EASY TO UNDERSTAND HOW A MERE **FOUR** MIGHT OCCASIONALLY GO UNNOTICED.

Y KNOW, PRINCESS, I'M GLAD HAN HAD TO PUT THE **MILLENNIUM FALCON** IN HERE FOR SUPPLIES. I'VE BEEN COOPED UP TOO LONG ON STARSHIPS. I WAS STARTING TO GO BATTY!

EVEN WHEN TWO OF THOSE FOUR ARE **PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA**-- FORMER IMPERIAL SENATOR FROM ALDERAAN, NOW A LEADER OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE--

--AND **LUKE SKYWALKER**, TATOOINE MOISTURE FARMER TURNED STAR-FIGHTER PILOT.


THEY'RE RUNNING A CALCULATED RISK BY VISITING TIRAHNN THAT-- AMONG THE CROWDS THRONGING THIS ANCIENT, LEGENDARY BAZAAR-- NO ONE WILL RECOGNIZE THEM. THE ODDS ARE IN THEIR FAVOR.
BUT SOMETIMES, EVEN WHEN YOU PLAY THE ODDS, YOU LOSE.
BY THE SEVEN MOONS OF SKARTIS-- IT'S THEM!
"TWO OF THOSE THE TYRANT SEEKS! AND IF THE FEMALE AND THE YOUTH ARE HERE--
"--HAN SOLO CANNOT BE FAR AWAY! I MUST NOTIFY THE TYRANT-- AT ONCE!"
UNAWARE THAT THEY'VE BEEN SPOTTED..
...LUKE AND LEIA CONTINUE THEIR STROLL THROUGH THE BAZAAR.
ALL MY LIFE, I'VE HEARD TALES OF THE GREAT TIRAHNN FAIR, BUT I NEVER THOUGHT I'D GET TO VISIT IT.
LIKE WHAT YOU SEE?
WELLL--THAT OUTFIT LOOKS A LITTLE DARING TO ME. ON TATOOINE, SHE'D BE ASKING FOR A BAD CASE OF SUNBURN OR WIND SCAR.
BUT THIS ISN'T TATOOINE, LUKE. ACTUALLY, THE GOWN'S A LITTLE... DEMURE FOR MY TASTES.
WHAAAT--???
PRINCESS...
...YOU'RE... JOKING, AREN'T YOU?
I WAS WONDERING HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE YOU TO NOTICE
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN QUITE A WHILE...
TWO YOUNG PEOPLE WHO'VE SEEN MORE THAN THEIR SHARE OF TRAGEDY REVEL IN THE JOY OF SIMPLY BEING ALIVE.
THE MOOD DOESN'T LAST LONG.
HUH--?! PRINCESS, THE CROWD--!

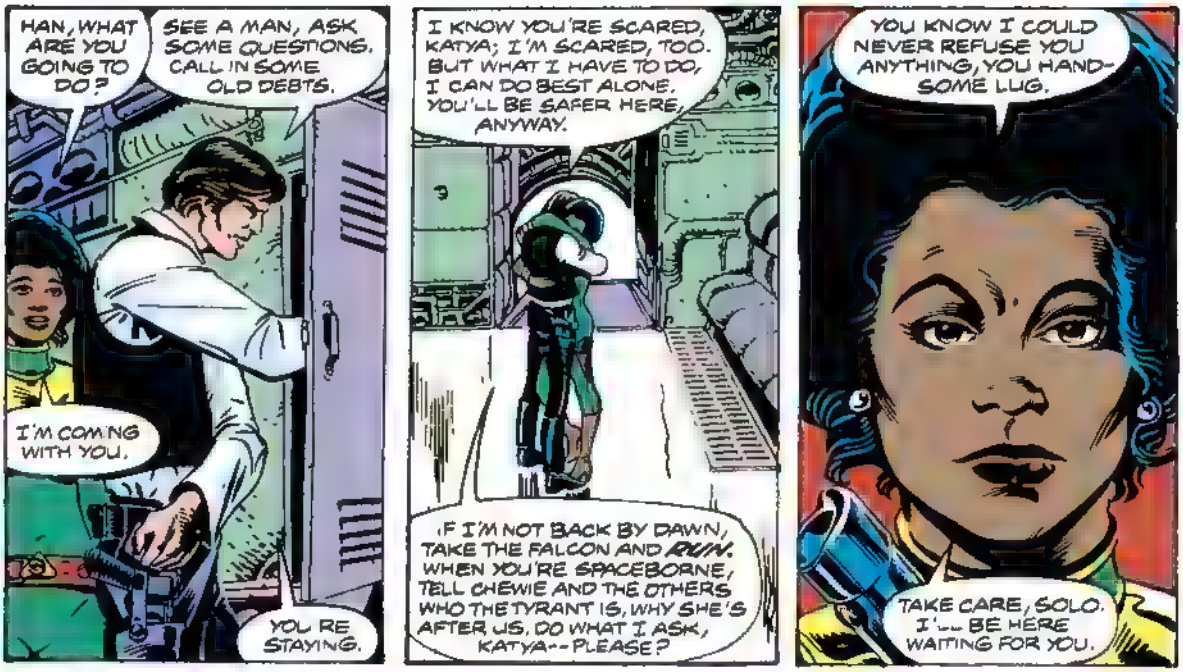
STAND THOU ASIDE, GRUBBERS!
MAKE WAY FOR THE MAJESTRIX OF SKYE!
THE WOMAN'S RACE IS UNKNOWN, AS IS HER TITLE, BUT ALL HASTEN TO OBEY THE SNARLED COMMANDS OF HER ESCORT--
--CATUMAN WARRIORS! BORN AND BRED TO THE ARTS OF WAR... FELINE MERCENARIES SAID TO BE FURY INCARNATE, AMONG THE DEADLIEST KILLERS IN EXISTENCE.
LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, LEIA MOVES ASIDE-- BUT NOT QUITE FAST ENOUGH.
:OH!!:
THAT WINGED WOMAN SLAMMED INTO YOU DELIBERATELY! WHO THE HECK DOES SHE THINK SHE IS--?!
HUSH, LUKE I'M ALL RIGHT.
LET IT PASS.
THE LAST THING WE NEED IS TO MAKE TROUBLE AND DRAW ATTENTION TO OURSELVES.
I SUPPOSE, I'LL ADMIT THOSE CATUMEN SURE LOOKED DANGEROUS.
IT'S SAID EVEN WOOKIEES GIVE THEM A WIDE BERTH. WHAT'S THAT?
A MONEY POUCH-- ISN'T IT YOURS?
THIEF!!
YOU DARE PRACTICE YOUR PICK-POCKET'S TRADE ON ME?!
THAT'S CRAZY. YOU MUST HAVE DROPPED THIS...
LIAR!
THESE HUMANS HAVE OFFENDED ME, MY PETS--
--SLAY THEM!!

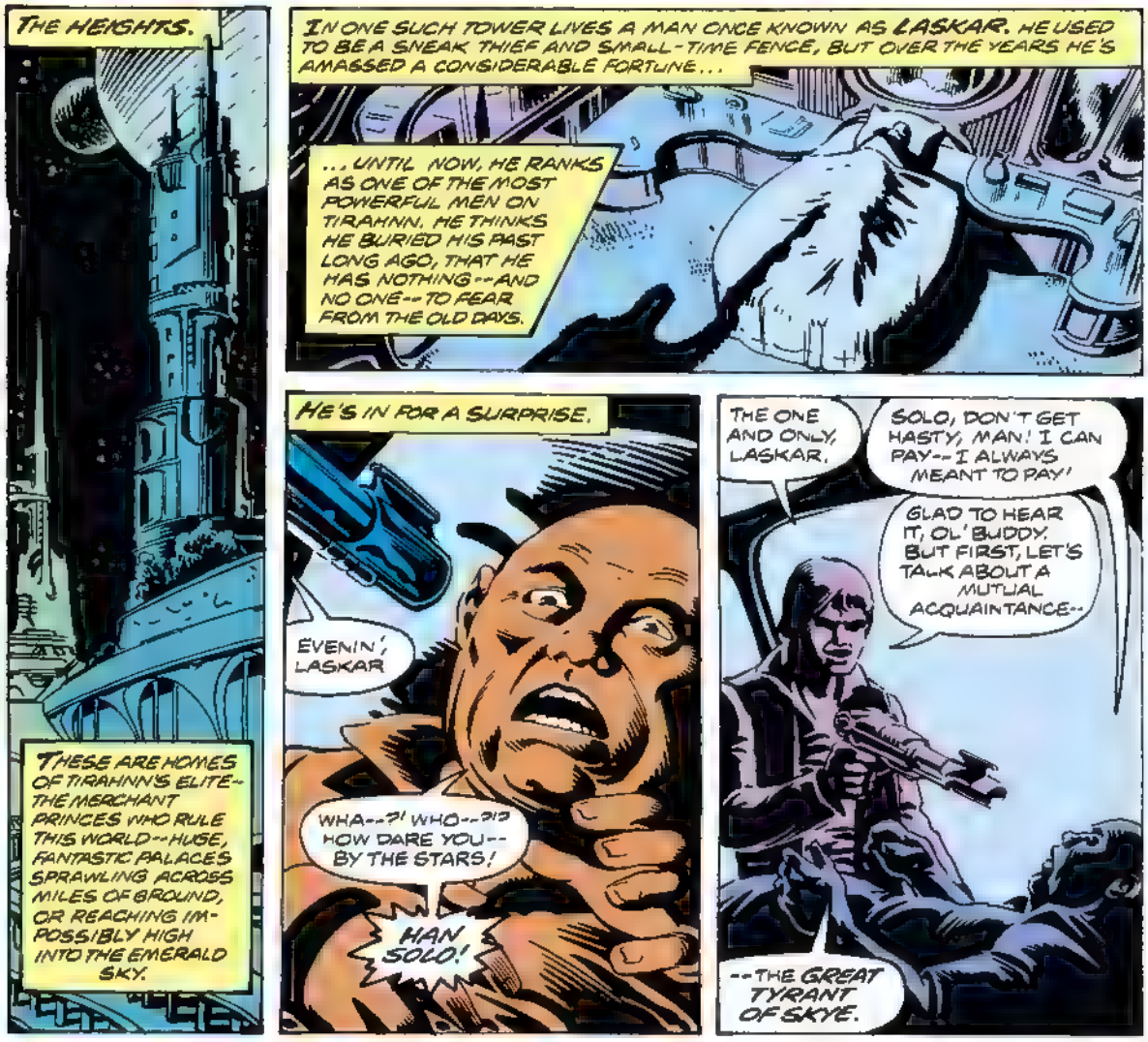
LUKE'S REACTION IS INSTINCTIVE...
...AND FAR FASTER THAN HE WOULD HAVE BELIEVED POSSIBLE NOT SO LONG AGO. IN ONE SMOOTH, FLUID MOTION, HIS LIGHTSABER IS IN HIS HAND, ITS SEARING ENERGY BLADE SENDING THE LEAD CATUMAN TO A WELL-DESERVED REWARD.
AARRRGH!!
THE OTHER WARRIORS PAUSE, SUDDENLY RESPECTFUL OF THEIR FOE'S WEAPON AND HIS OBVIOUS ABILITY.
FOR THE MOMENT, THE ADVANTAGE IS LUKE'S. HE DOESN'T INTEND TO THROW IT AWAY.
PRINCESS-- RUN! HEAD FOR THE FALCON. I'LL BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU!
BUT, LUKE-- WHAT ABOUT THE CATUMEN?!
"DON'T WORRY. I THINK I'VE GOT A WAY TO SLOW 'EM DOWN."
LUKE FEINTS LEFT, THEN SLASHES RIGHT WITH HIS LIGHTSABER, CUTTING THROUGH A THICK TANGLE OF HALYARDS..
...AND TOPPLING A LINE OF AWNINGS ON TOP OF THE TWO STARTLED WARRIORS. THEN, HE, TOO, IS ON HIS WAY.
EXCELLENT, YOUNG ONE. YOU'RE EVEN MORE IMPRESSIVE THAN I'D HOPED.
THOUGH YOU DO NOT YET KNOW IT, THE LONG HUNT HAS BEGUN. YOU AND PRINCESS LEIA WILL LEAD ME STRAIGHT TO HAN SOLO--AND THIS TIME, HE WILL NOT ESCAPE.
AND WHEN THE HUNT IS DONE, YOU WILL ALL D.E. SLOWLY. BY MY HANDS.

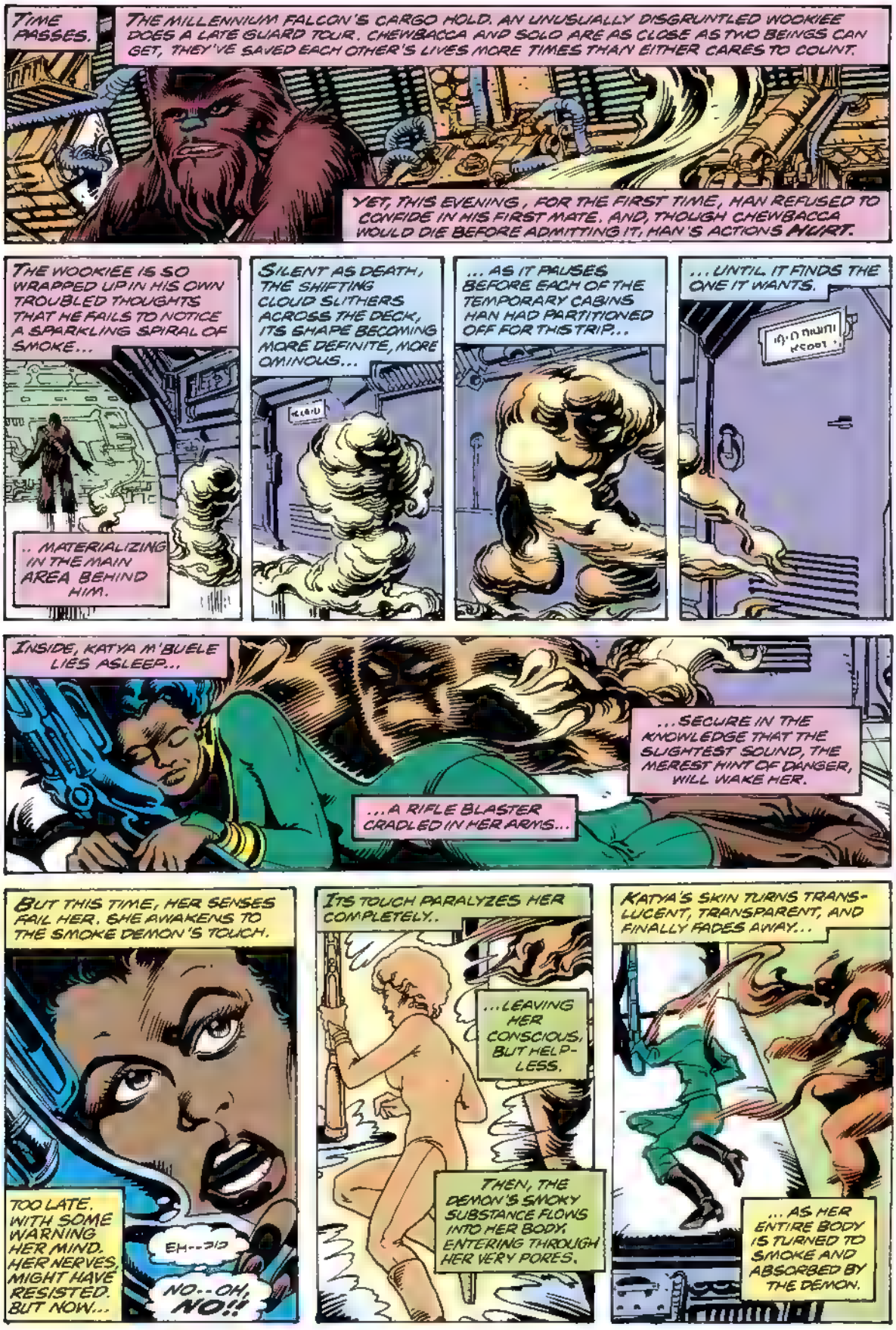
TIRAHNN-- TRADING NEXUS OF AN ENTIRE STELLAR CLUSTER, A CITY LARGER THAN SOME COUNTRIES, ITS ARCHITECTURE RANGING FROM THE STREET LEVEL HURLY-BURLY OF THE BAZAAR TO MILE-HIGH CORPORATE SKYSCRAPERS AND LUXURY PALACES.
IT'S AN EASY PLACE TO LOSE SOMEONE IN. SOMETIMES, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TURN A CORNER, OR LOOK THE WRONG WAY AT THE WRONG MOMENT.
BUT, TRY AS THEY MIGHT, LUKE AND LEIA CAN'T SHAKE THE TWO CATUMEN RELENTLESSLY DOGGING THEIR TRAIL.
LUKE TRIES EVERY TRICK HE'D EVER LEARNED ON TATOOINE-- HE EVEN INVENTS SOME BRAND NEW ONES ON THE SPOT-- TO NO AVAIL. EVERY TIME HE SPARES A QUICK GLANCE OVER HIS SHOULDER, THE CATUMEN ARE THERE.
SEEMS LIKE WE'VE BEEN RUNNING FOR-EVER. DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE PRINCESS, BUT I'M ALMOST WINDED. WE CAN'T KEEP UP THIS PACE MUCH LONGER.
SUDDENLY...
LUKE!
OH, NO! ONE OF THEM CUT AHEAD OF US! WE'RE TRAPPED IN THIS ALLEY!
NO CHOICE-- WE HAVE TO MAKE A STAND.
HE DOES HIS BEST, BUT HE'S TIRED, SLOW, AND THIS TIME THE CATUMAN IS READY FOR HIM.
BEFORE LUKE QUITE KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED, THE WARRIOR'S FIST RAKES HIS CHEST, KNUCKLE-SPIKES DRAWING BLOOD.

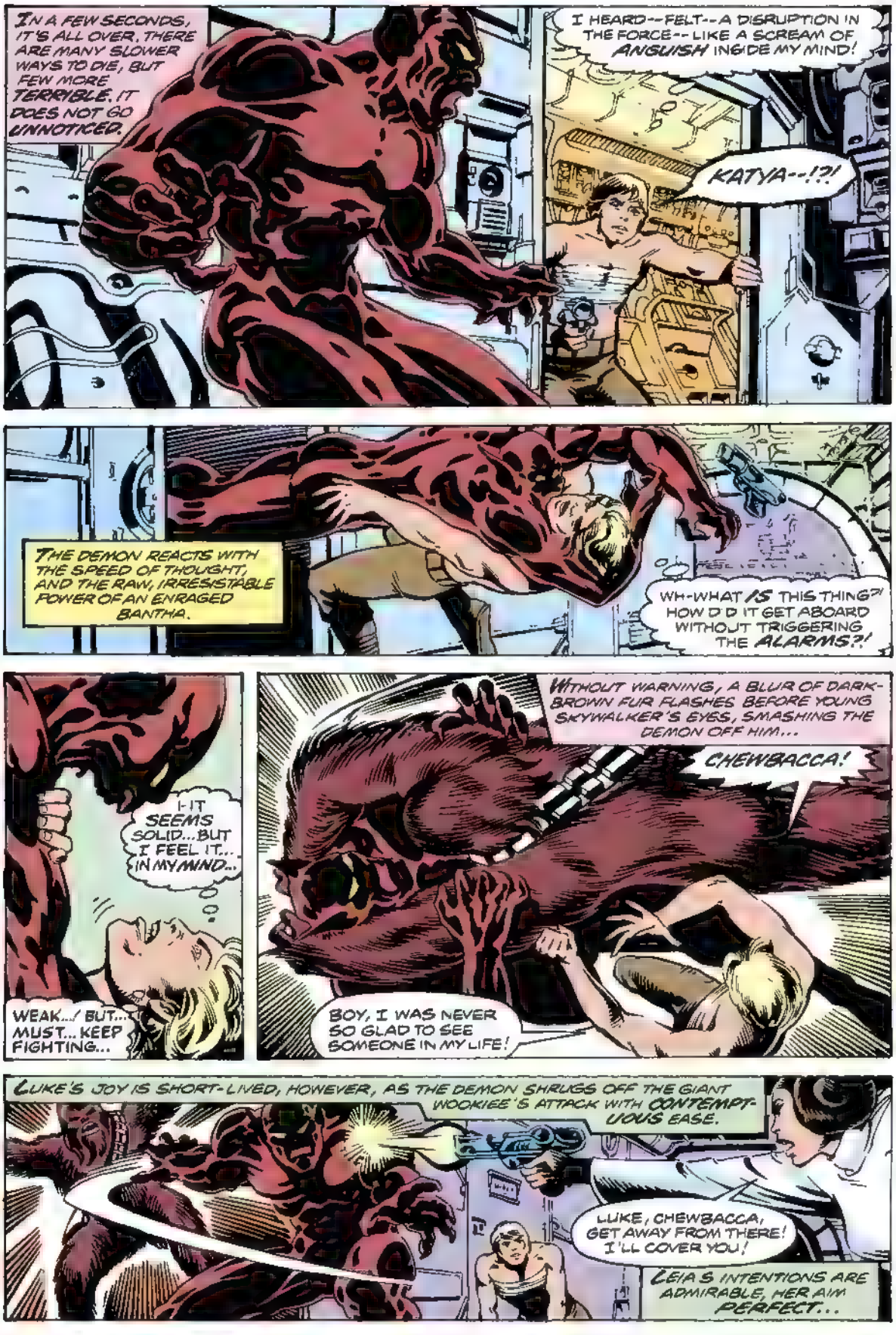
LUKE GOES DOWN, STUNNED, SLIPPING INTO SHOCK AS THE SECOND CATUMAN RUSHES TO HELP ITS BROTHER FINISH THEM OFF.
THE WARRIOR'S HASTE MAKES HIM CARELESS. THE CATUMAN NEVER SEES THE MASSIVE ARM THAT BRINGS HIM DOWN.
KRAK
NOR DOES HIS BROTHER SEE THE BLASTER BOLT THAT STOPS HIM IN HIS TRACKS.
THE FORCE BE PRAISED...!
VOOM
HAN SOLO! CHEWBACCA!
HRONNK!
YEAH, CHEWIE, I CAN SEE THE KID'S HURT. AFTER GOING ONE ON ONE WITH A "CAT," HE'S LUCKY TO BE ALIVE.
C'MON, YOUR WORSHIP, LET'S GET OUTTA HERE BEFORE THE LOCAL PREFECTS WORK UP ENOUGH COURAGE TO COME SEE WHO'S STILL BREATHING.
LATER, ABOARD THE STARSHIP MILLENNIUM FALCON, DOCKED AT TIRAHNN'S CENTRAL STARPORT...
HOW DID YOU FIND US, HAN? HOW DID YOU KNOW WE WERE EVEN IN TROUBLE?
I WISH I COULD TAKE THE BOWS, PRINCESS...
...BUT THE CREDIT BELONGS TO YOUR DROID BUDDIES. ARTOO HEARD THE ORIGINAL RADIO ALARM TO SECURITY HEADQUARTERS, THEN PATCHED INTO ONE OF SECURITY'S AIRBORNE 'SPY-EYES'" TO TRACK YOU DOWN.
PRINCESS--WILL MASTER LUKE RECOVER?
BOIP BOIP..BOEEP?
THANKS TO YOU TWO, THREEPIO, I THINK HE'LL BE JUST FINE.

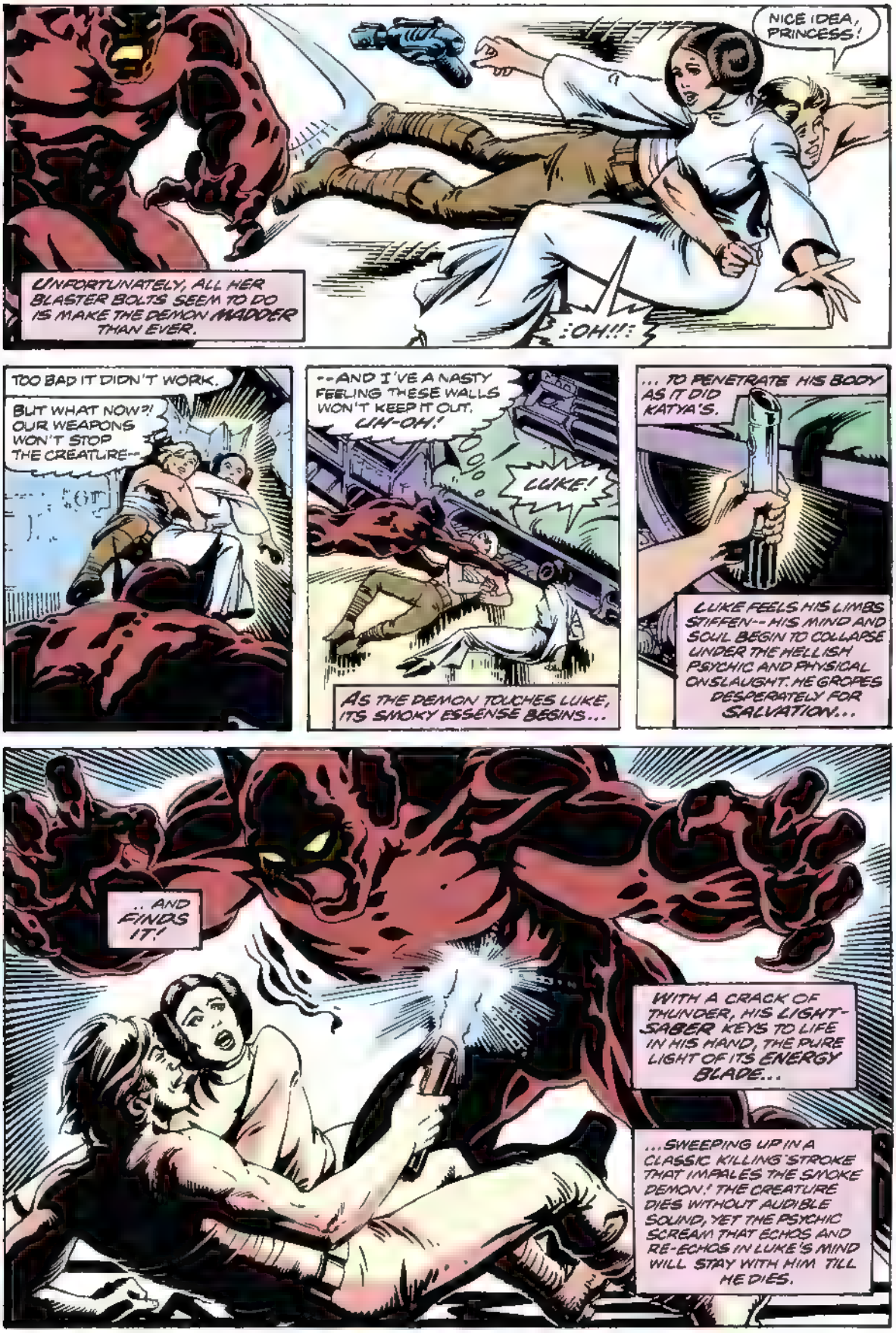
KID, IF YOU FEEL UP TO TALKING... WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED IN THE BAZAAR? THE REPORTS ARTOO PICKED UP WERE PRETTY CONFUSED.
UH-OH... I HEAR SOMEONE OUTSIDE THE MAIN HATCH I'D BETTER ANSWER-- COULD BE PREFECTS.
COVER ME, CHEWIE, IN CASE IT'S BROOD MATES OF THOSE CATUMEN WE ZAPPED--
SAME OLD SOLO-- SAYIN' "HI" TO AN OLD FRIEND BY STICKING A BLASTER IN HER FACE.
WHA--?! MOONS OF YAVIN-- KATYA!!
IT'S BEEN YEARS, WOMAN! HOW'VE YOU BEEN?!
LIVIN', SOLO. WORKIN', LAUGHIN' NOTHIN' SPECTACULAR-- BUT NO COMPLAINTS, EITHER.
LUKE, PRINCESS-- MEET KATYA M'BUELE.
WE CREWED TOGETHER ON A CORELLIAN RIM-RUNNER-- YOU NAME IT, WE'D SMUGGLE IT. THEY WERE GOOD TIMES, MOSTLY.
WELL, WELL, WELL-- THIS IS A SIDE TO CAPTAIN SOLO WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
SHE'S A NICE-LOOKING LADY. PRINCESS, ARE YOU JEALOUS?
LEIA DOESN'T REPLY, AND FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME, LUKE SKYWALKER THINKS OF HIS ATTRACTION TO SHE, AND WONDERS HOW SHE TRULY FEELS ABOUT HIM.
BACK TO BUSINESS, KID. I STILL WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORY.
THERE ISN'T MUCH TO TELL. WE WERE IN THE BAZAAR, WHEN THIS WINGED WOMAN ACCUSED US OF...
WINGED WOMAN?! DESCRIBE HER, LUKE!
UH, TALLER THAN YOU, REAL SLIM, BEAUTIFUL. HER BODY AND WINGS WERE GREEN, SHE WAS BALD, TOO, EXCEPT FOR A SILVER CREST...
HAN-- IT'S HER!
HAN-- WHAT IS IT?! DO YOU KNOW THE WOMAN?!?
IT'S OLD BUSINESS, K'D NOTHIN' FOR YOU TO WORRY ABOUT AN' NOTHIN' YOU CAN HELP WITH.


HAN, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
SEE A MAN, ASK SOME QUESTIONS. CALL IN SOME OLD DEBTS.
I'M COMING WITH YOU.
YOU'RE STAYING.
I KNOW YOU'RE SCARED, KATYA; I'M SCARED, TOO. BUT WHAT I HAVE TO DO, I CAN DO BEST ALONE. YOU'LL BE SAFER HERE, ANYWAY.
IF I'M NOT BACK BY DAWN, TAKE THE FALCON AND RUN. WHEN YOU'RE SPACEBORNE, TELL CHEWIE AND THE OTHERS WHO THE TYRANT IS, WHY SHE'S AFTER US, DO WHAT I ASK, KATYA--PLEASE?
YOU KNOW I COULD NEVER REFUSE YOU ANYTHING, YOU HANDSOME LUG.
TAKE CARE, SOLO. I'LL BE HERE WAITING FOR YOU.

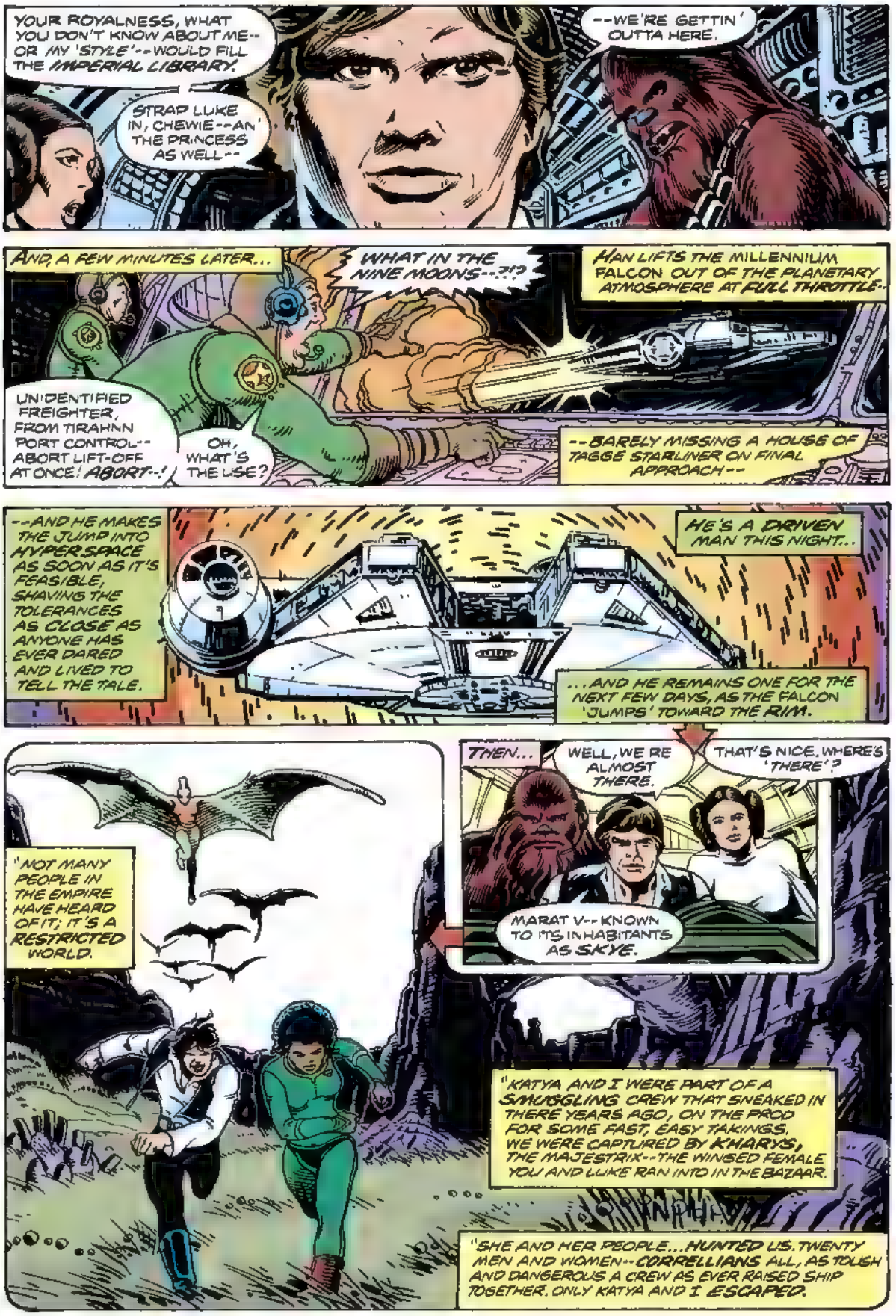

THE HEIGHTS.
THESE ARE HOMES OF TIRAHNN'S ELITE--THE MERCHANT PRINCES WHO RULE THIS WORLD--HUGE, FANTASTIC PALACES SPRAWLING ACROSS MILES OF GROUND, OR REACHING IMPOSSIBLY HIGH INTO THE EMERALD SKY.
IN ONE SUCH TOWER LIVES A MAN ONCE KNOWN AS LASKAR. HE USED TO BE A SNEAK THIEF AND SMALL-TIME FENCE, BUT OVER THE YEARS HE'S AMASSED A CONSIDERABLE FORTUNE...
...UNTIL NOW, HE RANKS AS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL MEN ON TIRAHNN. HE THINKS HE BURIED HIS PAST LONG AGO, THAT HE HAS NOTHING--AND NO ONE--TO FEAR FROM THE OLD DAYS.
HE'S IN FOR A SURPRISE.
EVENIN', LASKAR
WHA--?! WHO--?! HOW DARE YOU--BY THE STARS!
HAN SOLO!
THE ONE AND ONLY, LASKAR.
SOLO, DON'T GET HASTY, MAN! I CAN PAY--I ALWAYS MEANT TO PAY!
GLAD TO HEAR IT, OL' BUDDY. BUT FIRST, LET'S TALK ABOUT A MUTUAL ACQUAINTANCE--
--THE GREAT TYRANT OF SKYE.

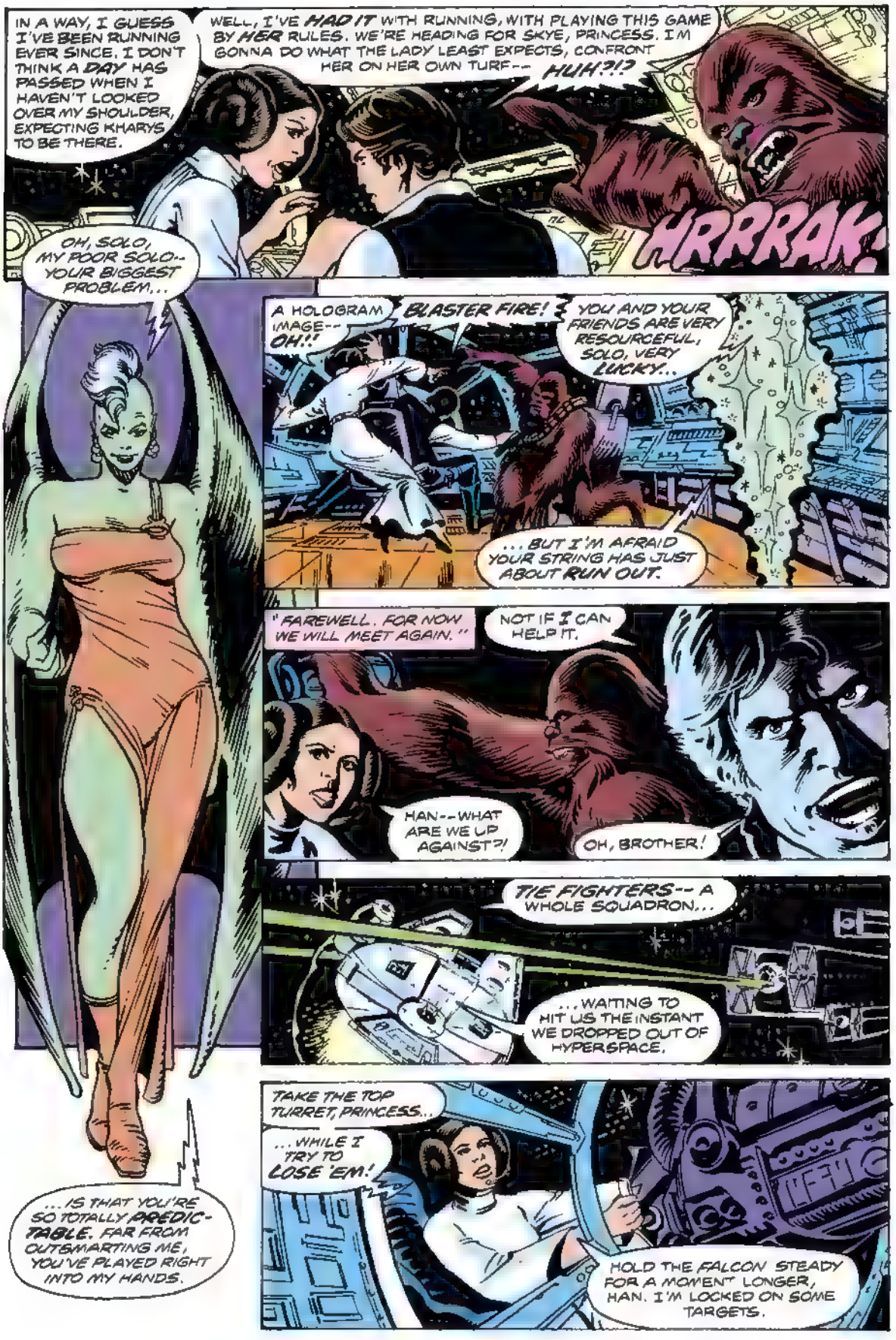

TIME PASSES.
THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S CARGO HOLD. AN UNUSUALLY DISGRUNTLED WOOKIEE DOES A LATE GUARD TOUR. CHEWBACCA AND SOLO ARE AS CLOSE AS TWO BEINGS CAN GET, THEY'VE SAVED EACH OTHER'S LIVES MORE TIMES THAN EITHER CARES TO COUNT.
YET, THIS EVENING, FOR THE FIRST TIME, HAN REFUSED TO CONFIDE IN HIS FIRST MATE. AND, THOUGH CHEWBACCA WOULD DIE BEFORE ADMITTING IT, HAN'S ACTIONS HURT.
THE WOOKIEE IS SO WRAPPED UP IN HIS OWN TROUBLED THOUGHTS THAT HE FAILS TO NOTICE A SPARKLING SPIRAL OF SMOKE...
.. MATERIALIZING IN THE MAIN AREA BEHIND HIM.
SILENT AS DEATH, THE SHIFTING CLOUD SLITHERS ACROSS THE DECK, ITS SHAPE BECOMING MORE DEFINITE, MORE OMINOUS...
... AS IT PAUSES BEFORE EACH OF THE TEMPORARY CABINS HAN HAD PARTITIONED OFF FOR THIS TRIP...
... UNTIL IT FINDS THE ONE IT WANTS.
INSIDE, KATYA M'BUELE LIES ASLEEP...
...A RIFLE BLASTER CRADLED IN HER ARMS...
...SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE SLIGHTEST SOUND, THE MEREST HINT OF DANGER, WILL WAKE HER.
BUT THIS TIME, HER SENSES FAIL HER. SHE AWAKENS TO THE SMOKE DEMON'S TOUCH.
TOO LATE. WITH SOME WARNING HER MIND, HER NERVES, MIGHT HAVE RESISTED. BUT NOW...
EH--?!?
NO--OH, NO!!
ITS TOUCH PARALYZES HER COMPLETELY..
...LEAVING HER CONSCIOUS, BUT HELPLESS.
THEN, THE DEMON'S SMOKY SUBSTANCE FLOWS INTO HER BODY, ENTERING THROUGH HER VERY PORES.
KATYA'S SKIN TURNS TRANSLUCENT, TRANSPARENT, AND FINALLY FADES AWAY...
... AS HER ENTIRE BODY IS TURNED TO SMOKE AND ABSORBED BY THE DEMON.


IN A FEW SECONDS, IT'S ALL OVER. THERE ARE MANY SLOWER WAYS TO DIE, BUT FEW MORE TERRIBLE. IT DOES NOT GO UNNOTICED.
I HEARD--FELT--A DISRUPTION IN THE FORCE--LIKE A SCREAM OF ANGUISH INSIDE MY MIND!
KATYA--!?!
THE DEMON REACTS WITH THE SPEED OF THOUGHT, AND THE RAW, IRRESISTABLE POWER OF AN ENRAGED BANTHA.
WH-WHAT IS THIS THING?! HOW D'D IT GET ABOARD WITHOUT TRIGGERING THE ALARMS?!
I-IT SEEMS SOLID...BUT I FEEL IT... IN MY MIND...
WEAK.../ BUT... MUST... KEEP FIGHTING...
WITHOUT WARNING, A BLUR OF DARK-BROWN FUR FLASHES BEFORE YOUNG SKYWALKER'S EYES, SMASHING THE DEMON OFF HIM...
CHEWBACCA!
BOY, I WAS NEVER SO GLAD TO SEE SOMEONE IN MY LIFE!
LUKE'S JOY IS SHORT-LIVED, HOWEVER, AS THE DEMON SHRUGS OFF THE GIANT WOOKIEE'S ATTACK WITH CONTEMPTUOUS EASE.
LUKE, CHEWBACCA, GET AWAY FROM THERE! I'LL COVER YOU!
LEIA'S INTENTIONS ARE ADMIRABLE, HER AIM PERFECT...


NICE IDEA, PRINCESS!
UNFORTUNATELY, ALL HER BLASTER BOLTS SEEM TO DO IS MAKE THE DEMON MADDER THAN EVER.
:OH!!:
TOO BAD IT DIDN'T WORK.
BUT WHAT NOW?! OUR WEAPONS WON'T STOP THE CREATURE--
--AND I'VE A NASTY FEELING THESE WALLS WON'T KEEP IT OUT. UH-OH!
LUKE!
AS THE DEMON TOUCHES LUKE, ITS SMOKY ESSENSE BEGINS...
... TO PENETRATE HIS BODY AS IT DID KATYA'S.
LUKE FEELS HIS LIMBS STIFFEN-- HIS MIND AND SOUL BEGIN TO COLLAPSE UNDER THE HELLISH PSYCHIC AND PHYSICAL ONSLAUGHT. HE GROPES DESPERATELY FOR SALVATION...
... AND FINDS IT!
WITH A CRACK OF THUNDER, HIS LIGHT-SABER KEYS TO LIFE IN HIS HAND, THE PURE LIGHT OF ITS ENERGY BLADE...
...SWEEPING UP IN A CLASSIC KILLING STROKE THAT IMPALES THE SMOKE DEMON! THE CREATURE DIES WITHOUT AUDIBLE SOUND, YET THE PSYCHIC SCREAM THAT ECHOS AND RE-ECHOS IN LUKE'S MIND WILL STAY WITH HIM TILL HE DIES.

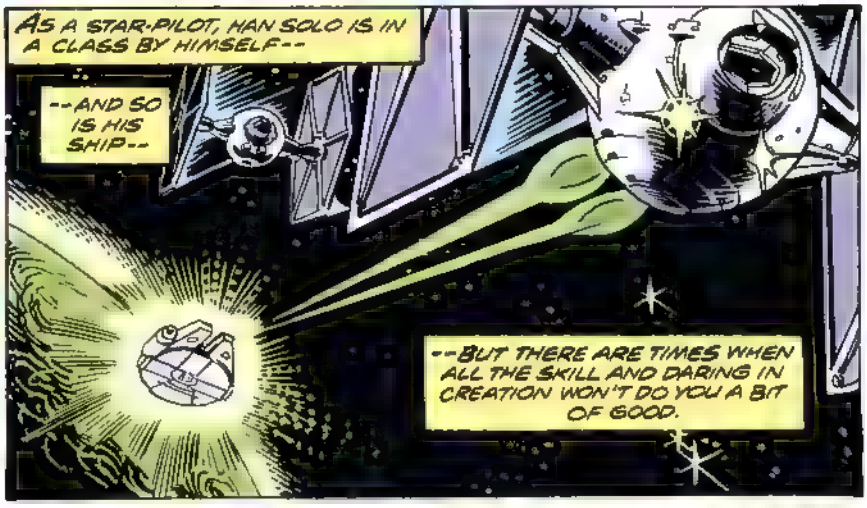
AS THE SMOKE CLEARS, LUKE ISN'T ALL THAT SURPRISED TO FIND HIMSELF SHAKING, TO FIND HIS FACE STAINED WITH UNACCUSTOMED TEARS.
IS--IS IT... DEAD?
IT'S DEAD.
AND ALL THE SOULS OF ITS VICTIMS--TRAPPED WITHIN THAT MONSTER --ARE FINALLY FREE.
I'VE BEEN SCARED BEFORE--I'VE FACED DEATH BEFORE, LOTS OF TIMES--BUT I'VE NEVER FELT ANYTHING LIKE THIS.
THAT DEMON WAS... A CREATION OF THE FORCE-- GIVEN LIFE BY SOMEONE WHOSE POWER RIVALS DARTH VADER'S.
CHEWBACCA--MEDICINE AND HOT SOUP, QUICKLY! AND BLANKETS, TOO! LUKE'S SLIPPING INTO SHOCK!
I DON'T LIKE IT. HE'S SO PALE. HE LOOKS ALMOST AS BAD AS HE DID THAT TIME HIS MIND ACCIDENTALLY TOUCHED DARTH VADER'S. *
THAT SOUND-- IT'S THE ENTRY ALARM!
BREEP BREEP BREEP
* WAAAAY BACK IN STAR WARS #18--ARCHIE.
CAUTIOUSLY, CHEWBACCA ADMITS THE VISITOR, AND...
WHAT THE BLAZES IS GOIN' ON HERE?! I'VE BEEN POUNDIN ON THAT BLASTED HATCH FOR FIVE MINUTES!
HAN! THANK THE FORCE IT'S YOU.
LEIA QUICKLY TELLS THE CORRELLIAN STAR-PILOT WHAT'S HAPPENED...
KATYA--LAUGHIN' KATYA... DEAD...?
I'M SORRY, HAN. I KNOW SHE WAS YOUR FRIEND.
SHE WAS THAT, PRINCESS-- AND A LOT MORE.
SHOW ME.
IT'S MY FAULT I SHOULDN'T HAVE LEFT HER. I THOUGHT SHE'D BE SAFE HERE--THAT I'D BE TAKING ALL THE RISKS.
YOU DID ALL YOU COULD, HAN.
YEAH? I COULD HAVE RUN, LADY. I SURE WANTED TO.
SOMEHOW, THAT DOESN'T SEEM YOUR STYLE.


YOUR ROYALNESS, WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME--OR MY 'STYLE'--WOULD FILL THE IMPERIAL LIBRARY.
STRAP LUKE IN, CHEWIE--AN' THE PRINCESS AS WELL--
--WE'RE GETTIN' OUTTA HERE.
AND, A FEW MINUTES LATER...
WHAT IN THE NINE MOONS--?!?
HAN LIFTS THE MILLENNIUM FALCON OUT OF THE PLANETARY ATMOSPHERE AT FULL THROTTLE--
UNIDENTIFIED FREIGHTER, FROM TIRAHNN PORT CONTROL--ABORT LIFT-OFF AT ONCE! ABORT--!
OH, WHAT'S THE USE?
--BARELY MISSING A HOUSE OF TAGGE STARLINER ON FINAL APPROACH--
--AND HE MAKES THE JUMP INTO HYPERSPACE AS SOON AS IT'S FEASIBLE, SHAVING THE TOLERANCES AS CLOSE AS ANYONE HAS EVER DARED AND LIVED TO TELL THE TALE.
HE'S A DRIVEN MAN THIS NIGHT...
...AND HE REMAINS ONE FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, AS THE FALCON 'JUMPS' TOWARD THE RIM.
"NOT MANY PEOPLE IN THE EMPIRE HAVE HEARD OF IT; IT'S A RESTRICTED WORLD.
THEN...
WELL, WE RE ALMOST THERE.
THAT'S NICE. WHERE'S 'THERE'?
MARAT V--KNOWN TO ITS INHABITANTS AS SKYE.
"KATYA AND I WERE PART OF A SMUGGLING CREW THAT SNEAKED IN THERE YEARS AGO, ON THE PROD FOR SOME FAST, EASY TAKINGS. WE WERE CAPTURED BY KHARYS, THE MAJESTRIX--THE WINGED FEMALE YOU AND LUKE RAN INTO IN THE BAZAAR.
"SHE AND HER PEOPLE...HUNTED US. TWENTY MEN AND WOMEN--CORRELLIANS ALL, AS TOUGH AND DANGEROUS A CREW AS EVER RAISED SHIP TOGETHER. ONLY KATYA AND I ESCAPED.

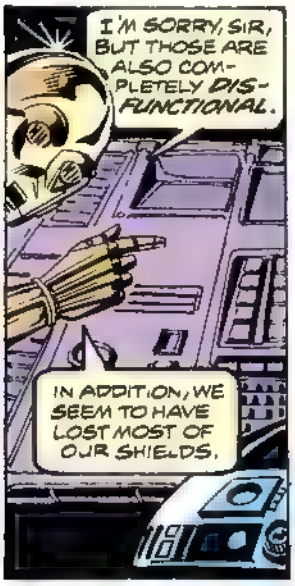

IN A WAY, I GUESS I'VE BEEN RUNNING EVER SINCE. I DON'T THINK A DAY HAS PASSED WHEN I HAVEN'T LOOKED OVER MY SHOULDER, EXPECTING KHARYS TO BE THERE.
WELL, I'VE HAD IT WITH RUNNING, WITH PLAYING THIS GAME BY HER RULES. WE'RE HEADING FOR SKYE, PRINCESS. I'M GONNA DO WHAT THE LADY LEAST EXPECTS, CONFRONT HER ON HER OWN TURF--
HUH?!?
HRRRAK!
OH, SOLO, MY POOR SOLO-- YOUR BIGGEST PROBLEM...
...IS THAT YOU'RE SO TOTALLY PREDICTABLE. FAR FROM OUTSMARTING ME, YOU'VE PLAYED RIGHT INTO MY HANDS.
A HOLOGRAM IMAGE-- OH!!
BLASTER FIRE!
YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS ARE VERY RESOURCEFUL, SOLO, VERY LUCKY...
...BUT I'M AFRAID YOUR STRING HAS JUST ABOUT RUN OUT.
"FAREWELL. FOR NOW WE WILL MEET AGAIN."
NOT IF I CAN HELP IT.
HAN--WHAT ARE WE UP AGAINST?!
OH, BROTHER!
TIE FIGHTERS-- A WHOLE SQUADRON...
...WAITING TO HIT US THE INSTANT WE DROPPED OUT OF HYPERSPACE.
TAKE THE TOP TURRET, PRINCESS...
...WHILE I TRY TO LOSE 'EM!
HOLD THE FALCON STEADY FOR A MOMENT LONGER, HAN. I'M LOCKED ON SOME TARGETS.

THREE SHOTS, THREE DIRECT HITS, THREE LESS TIE FIGHTERS TO WORRY ABOUT
THREE DEAD IMPERIALS TO WEIGH IN THE BALANCE AGAINST THE MILLIONS SLAUGHTERED WITHOUT MERCY WHEN THE EMPEROR'S DEATH STAR DESTROYED LEIA'S HOMEWORLD, ALDERAAN.*
NICE SHOOTING, PRINCESS!
I DO MY HUMBLE BEST.
*STAR WARS #3 --ARCHIE.

TROUBLE IS...
...THERE'S A LOT MORE WHERE THOSE CAME FROM. THEY'RE HITTING US FROM ALL SIDES!

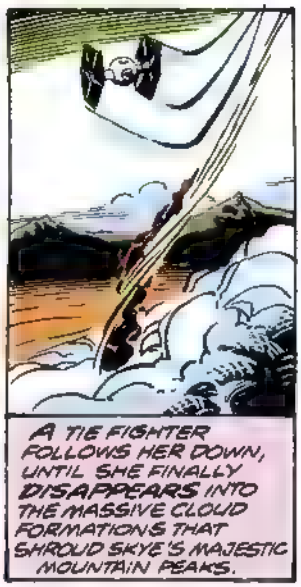

AS A STAR-PILOT, HAN SOLO IS IN A CLASS BY HIMSELF--
--AND SO IS HIS SHIP--
--BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN ALL THE SKILL AND DARING IN CREATION WON'T DO YOU A BIT OF GOOD.

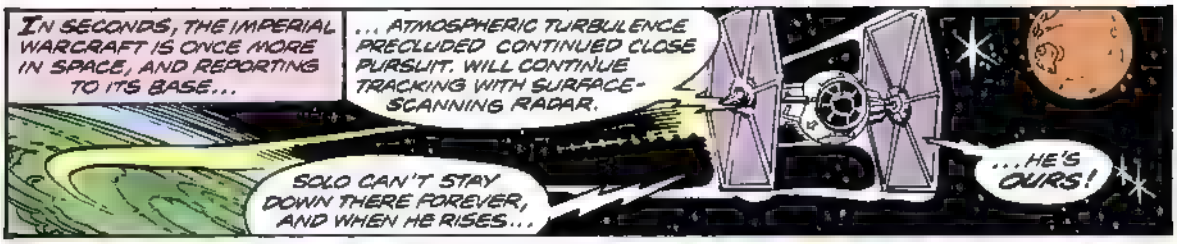
THIS IS ONE OF THEM.
STOP BLEEPING, ARTOO!
YOU RUST-CHOKED GEAR-BOX-- I CAN SEE WE'RE FLOATING!
THE ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY'S GONE!
VRP! BEEP!
CHEWIE-- AUXILIARY SYSTEMS! FAST!


I'M SORRY, SIR, BUT THOSE ARE ALSO COMPLETELY DISFUNCTIONAL.
IN ADDITION, WE SEEM TO HAVE LOST MOST OF OUR SHIELDS.

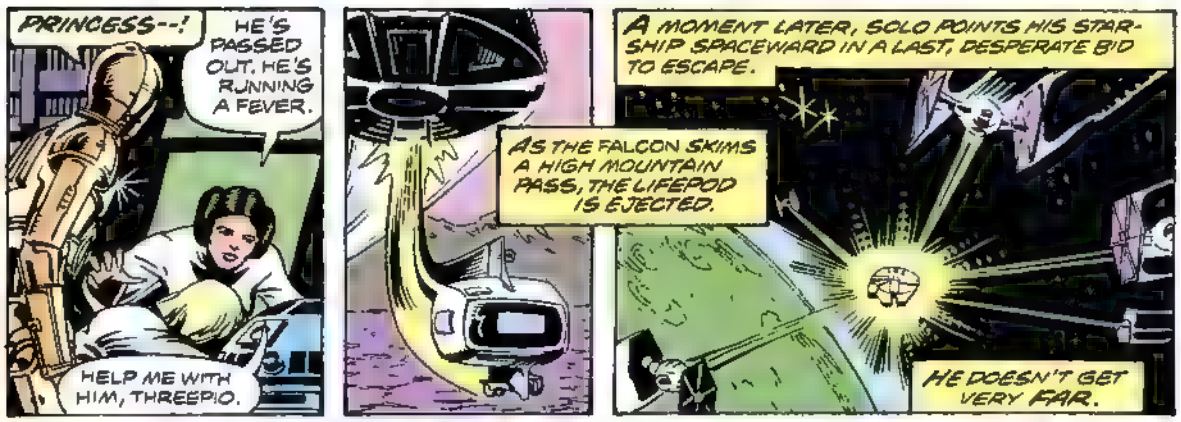
FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, SIR, WE ARE DEFENSELESS.
TUMBLING END OVER END...

...AND TRAILING A TAIL OF FIRE KILOMETERS LONG, THE MILLENIUM FALCON PLUNGES INTO SKYE'S ATMOSPHERE.

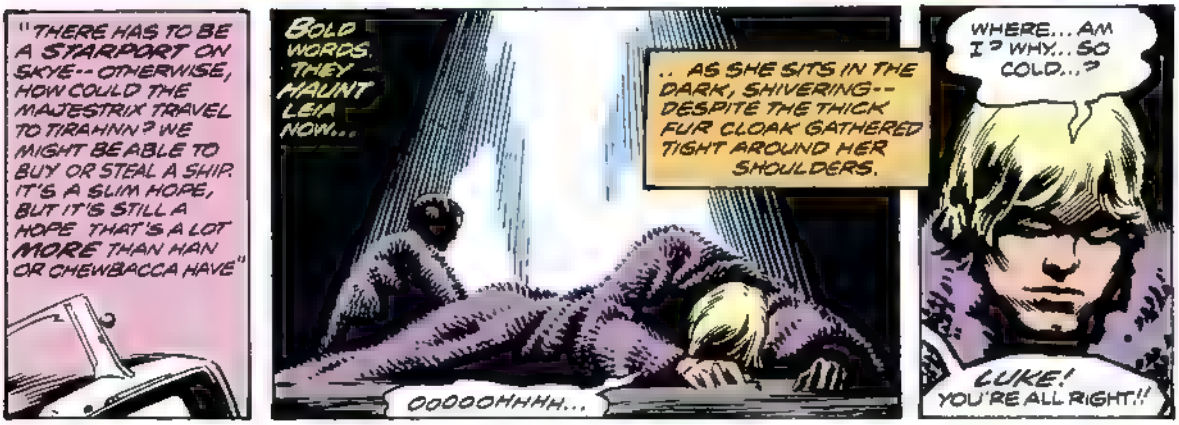

A TIE FIGHTER FOLLOWS HER DOWN, UNTIL SHE FINALLY DISAPPEARS INTO THE MASSIVE CLOUD FORMATIONS THAT SHROUD SKYE'S MAJESTIC MOUNTAIN PEAKS.

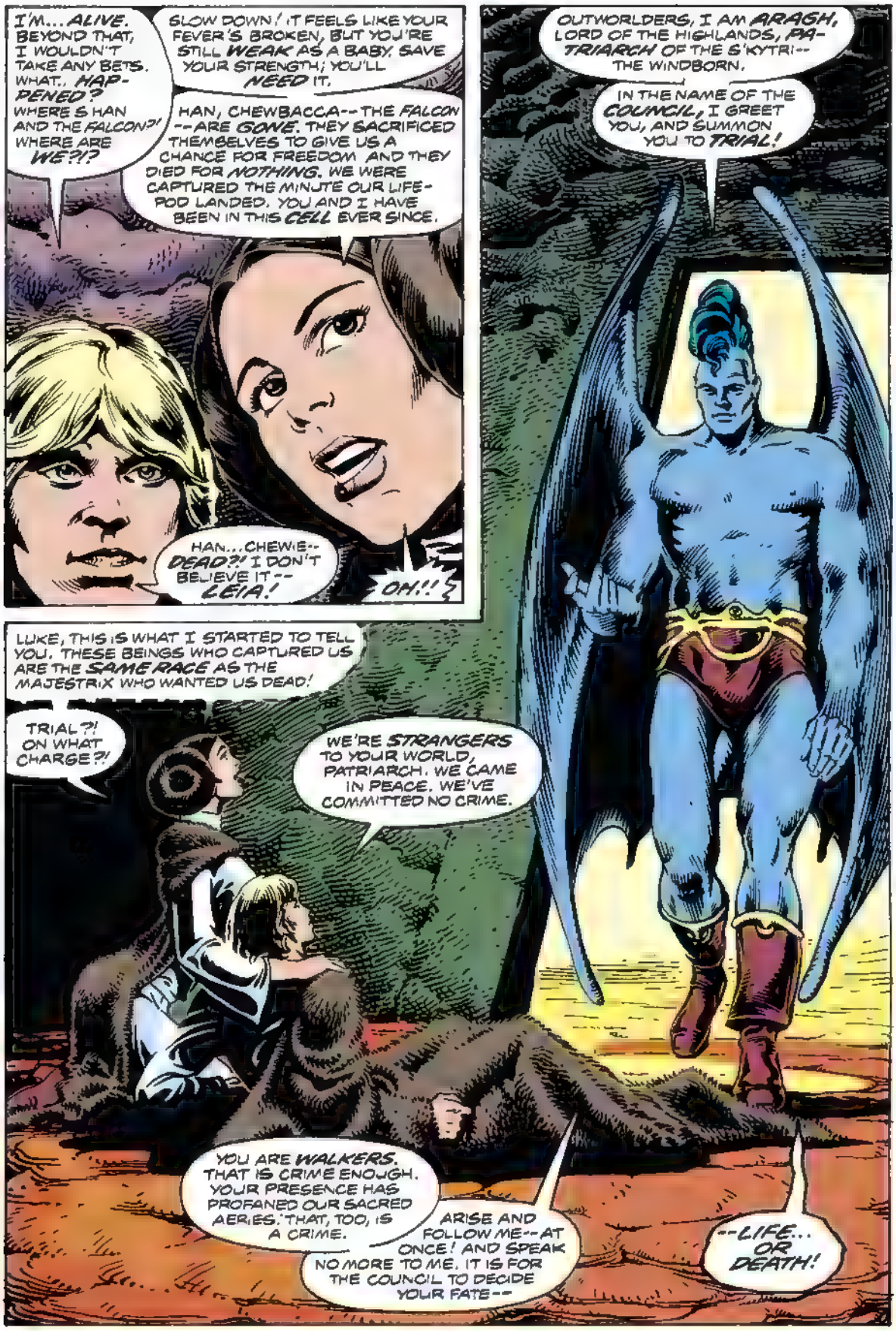

IN SECONDS, THE IMPERIAL WARCRAFT IS ONCE MORE IN SPACE, AND REPORTING TO ITS BASE...
... ATMOSPHERIC TURBULENCE PRECLUDED CONTINUED CLOSE PURSUIT. WILL CONTINUE TRACKING WITH SURFACE-SCANNING RADAR.
SOLO CAN'T STAY DOWN THERE FOREVER, AND WHEN HE RISES...
...HE'S OURS!

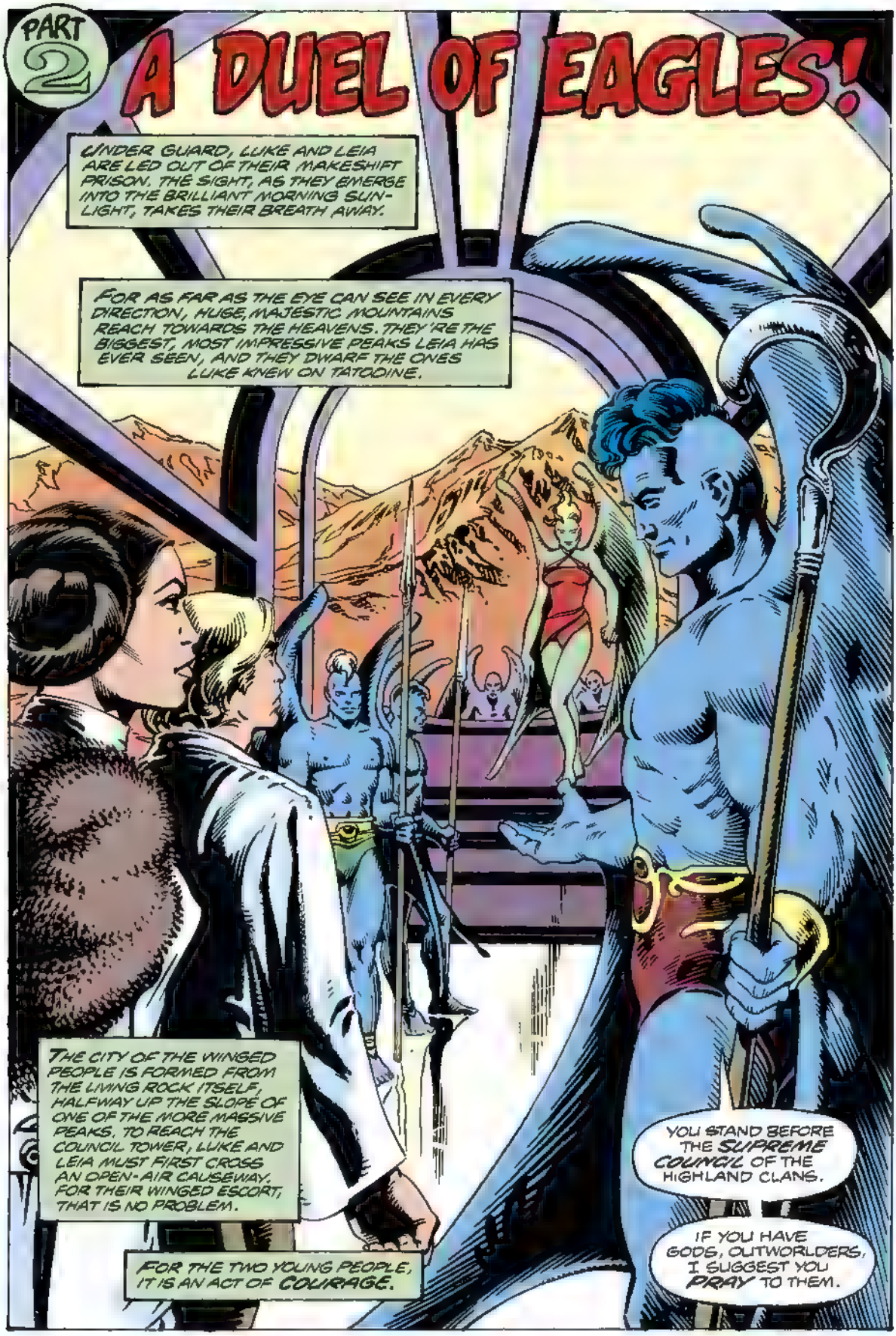
MEANWHILE...
INTO THE LIFEPOD, YOU TWO.
HAN--N-NO...! WE CAN... HELP YOU.
MISTRESS, MASTER LUKE'S LIFE-READINGS...!
I KNOW, THREEPIO. LUKE...

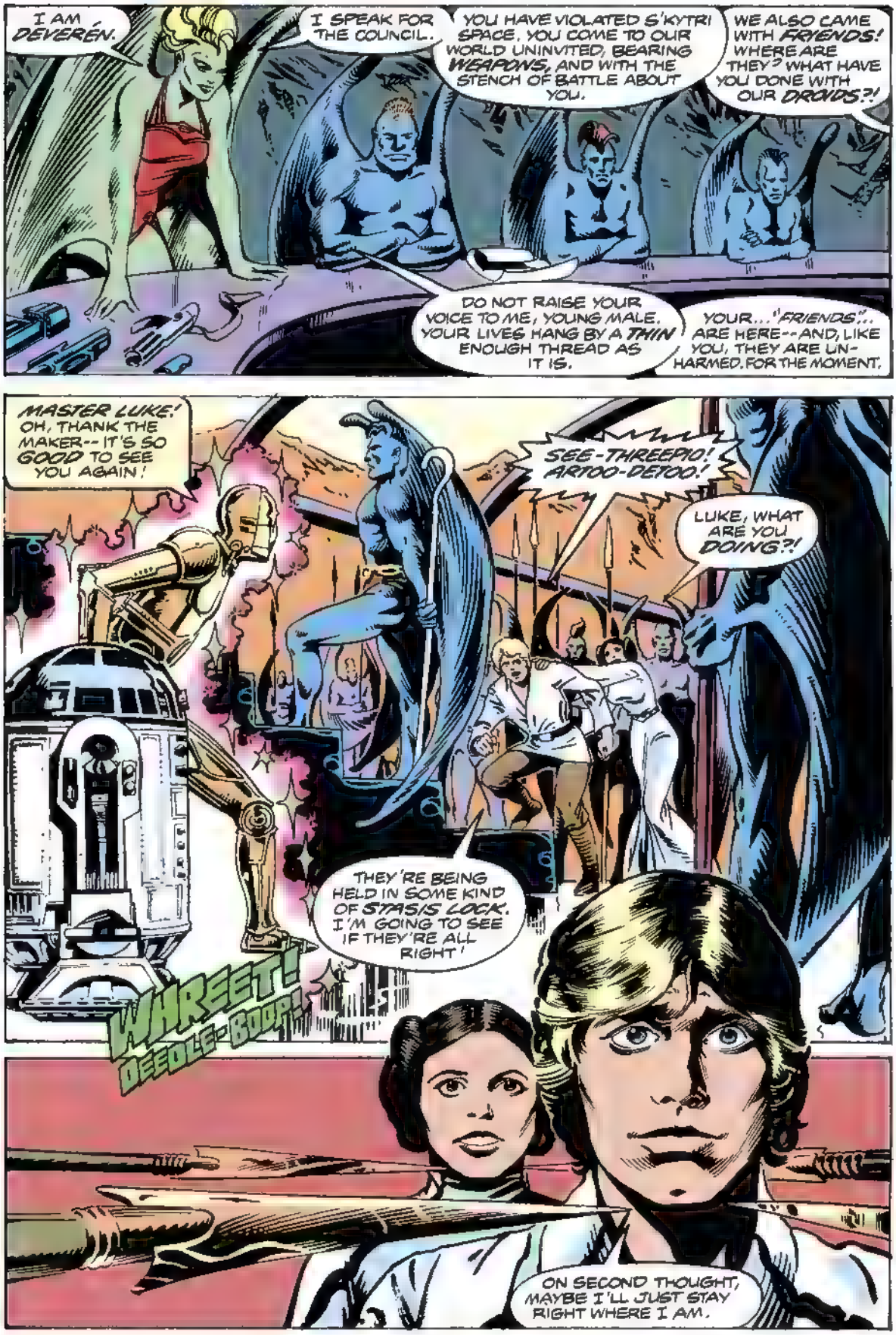

PRINCESS--!
HE'S PASSED OUT. HE'S RUNNING A FEVER.
HELP ME WITH HIM, THREEPIO.
AS THE FALCON SKIMS A HIGH MOUNTAIN PASS, THE LIFEPOD IS EJECTED.
A MOMENT LATER, SOLO POINTS HIS STAR-SHIP SPACEWARD IN A LAST, DESPERATE BID TO ESCAPE.
HE DOESN'T GET VERY FAR.

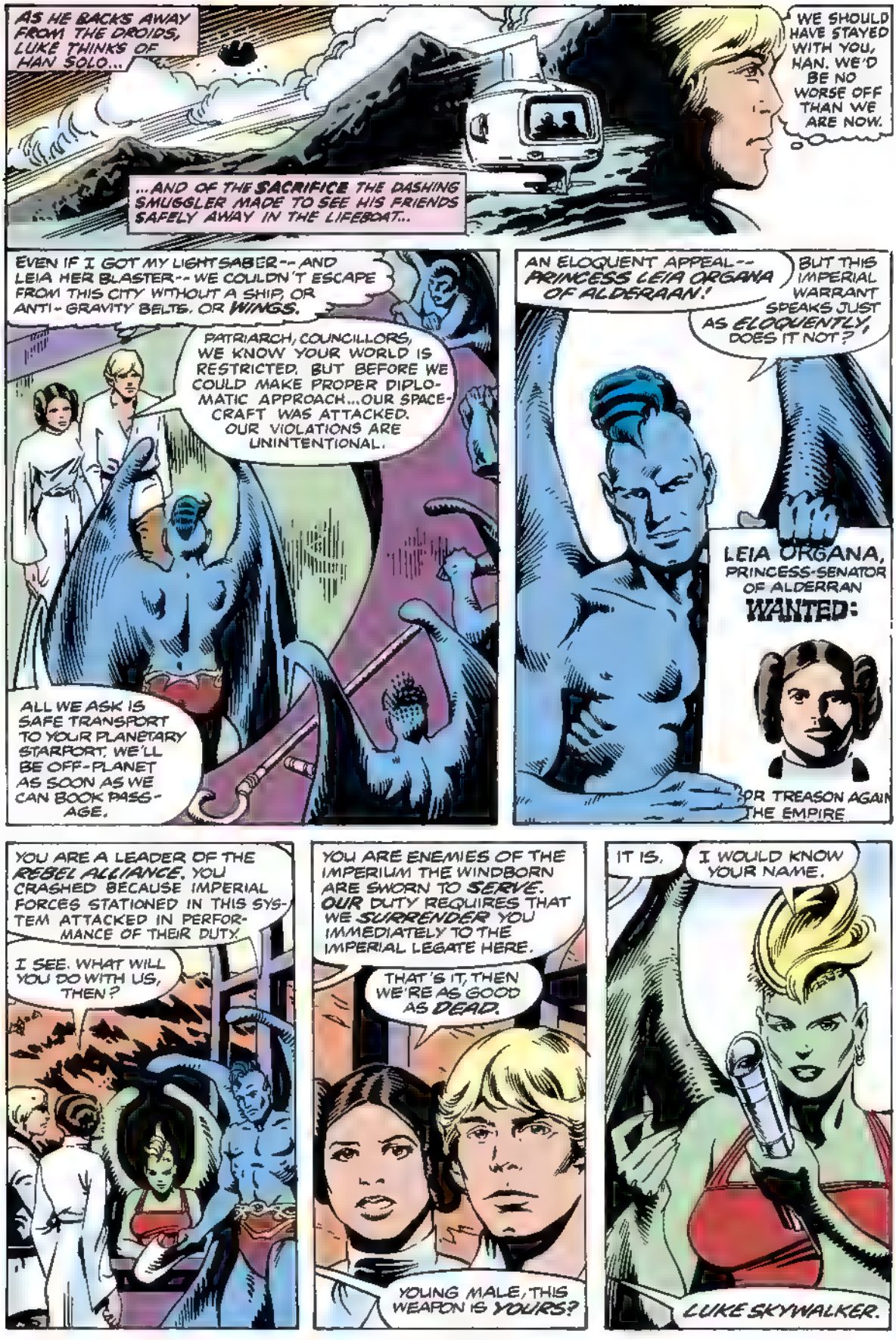
MISTRESS, WHY DID MASTER SOLO ABANDON US? ARE YOU AND MASTER LUKE NOT HIS FRIENDS?
HE DID IT TO SAVE US, THREEPIO. HE KNEW THE FALCON HAD NO CHANCE--IT'S TOO B G A TARGET TO MISS.
BUT THE IMPERIALS MIGHT OVERLOOK A LIFEPOD.


"THERE HAS TO BE A STARPORT ON SKYE--OTHERWISE, HOW COULD THE MAJESTRIX TRAVEL TO TIRAHNN? WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO BUY OR STEAL A SHIP. IT'S A SLIM HOPE, BUT IT'S STILL A HOPE THAT'S A LOT MORE THAN HAN OR CHEWBACCA HAVE"
BOLD WORDS. THEY HAUNT LEIA NOW...
OOOOOHHHH...
.. AS SHE SITS IN THE DARK, SHIVERING--DESPITE THE THICK FUR CLOAK GATHERED TIGHT AROUND HER SHOULDERS.
WHERE... AM I? WHY... SO COLD...?
LUKE! YOU'RE ALL RIGHT!!


I'M... ALIVE. BEYOND THAT, I WOULDN'T TAKE ANY BETS. WHAT... HAPPENED? WHERE'S HAN AND THE FALCON?! WHERE ARE WE?!?
SLOW DOWN! IT FEELS LIKE YOUR FEVER'S BROKEN, BUT YOU'RE STILL WEAK AS A BABY. SAVE YOUR STRENGTH; YOU'LL NEED IT.
HAN, CHEWBACCA--THE FALCON--ARE GONE. THEY SACRIFICED THEMSELVES TO GIVE US A CHANCE FOR FREEDOM AND THEY DIED FOR NOTHING. WE WERE CAPTURED THE MINUTE OUR LIFE-POD LANDED. YOU AND I HAVE BEEN IN THIS CELL EVER SINCE.
HAN...CHEWIE--DEAD?! I DON'T BELIEVE IT--LEIA!
OH!!
OUTWORLDERS, I AM ARAGH, LORD OF THE HIGHLANDS, PATRIARCH OF THE S'KYTRI--THE WINDBORN.
IN THE NAME OF THE COUNCIL, I GREET YOU, AND SUMMON YOU TO TRIAL!
LUKE, THIS IS WHAT I STARTED TO TELL YOU. THESE BEINGS WHO CAPTURED US ARE THE SAME RACE AS THE MAJESTRIX WHO WANTED US DEAD!
TRIAL?! ON WHAT CHARGE?!
WE'RE STRANGERS TO YOUR WORLD, PATRIARCH. WE CAME IN PEACE. WE'VE COMMITTED NO CRIME.
YOU ARE WALKERS. THAT IS CRIME ENOUGH. YOUR PRESENCE HAS PROFANED OUR SACRED AERIES. THAT, TOO, IS A CRIME.
ARISE AND FOLLOW ME--AT ONCE! AND SPEAK NO MORE TO ME. IT IS FOR THE COUNCIL TO DECIDE YOUR FATE--
--LIFE... OR DEATH!

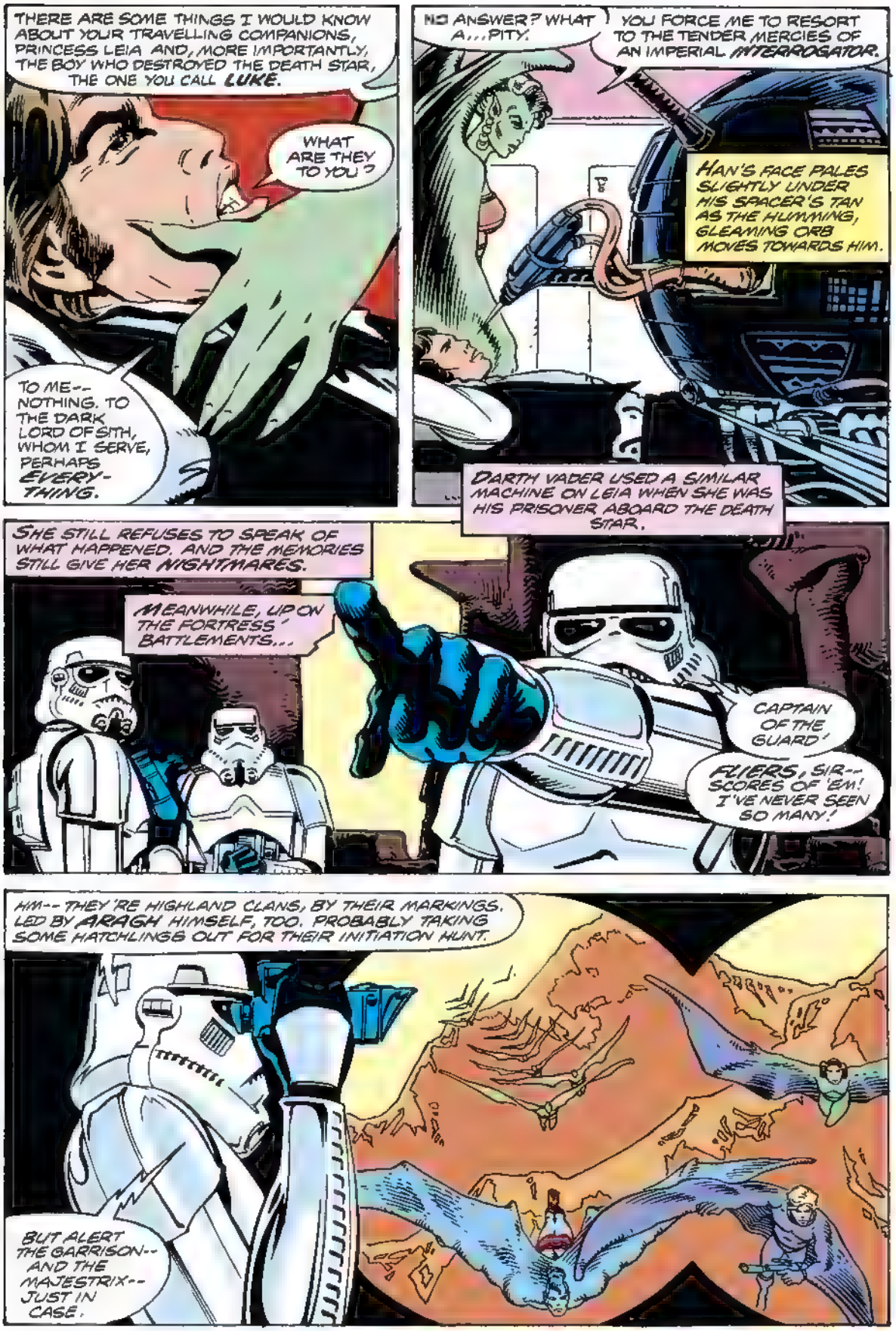

PART 2
A DUEL OF EAGLES!
UNDER GUARD, LUKE AND LEIA ARE LED OUT OF THEIR MAKESHIFT PRISON. THE SIGHT, AS THEY EMERGE INTO THE BRILLIANT MORNING SUNLIGHT, TAKES THEIR BREATH AWAY.
FOR AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE IN EVERY DIRECTION, HUGE, MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS REACH TOWARDS THE HEAVENS. THEY'RE THE BIGGEST, MOST IMPRESSIVE PEAKS LEIA HAS EVER SEEN, AND THEY DWARF THE ONES LUKE KNEW ON TATOOINE.
THE CITY OF THE WINGED PEOPLE IS FORMED FROM THE LIVING ROCK ITSELF, HALFWAY UP THE SLOPE OF ONE OF THE MORE MASSIVE PEAKS. TO REACH THE COUNCIL TOWER, LUKE AND LEIA MUST FIRST CROSS AN OPEN-AIR CAUSEWAY. FOR THEIR WINGED ESCORT, THAT IS NO PROBLEM.
FOR THE TWO YOUNG PEOPLE, IT IS AN ACT OF COURAGE.
YOU STAND BEFORE THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE HIGHLAND CLANS.
IF YOU HAVE GODS, OUTWORLDERS, I SUGGEST YOU PRAY TO THEM.


I AM DEVERÉN.
I SPEAK FOR THE COUNCIL.
YOU HAVE VIOLATED S'KYTRI SPACE. YOU COME TO OUR WORLD UNINVITED, BEARING WEAPONS, AND WITH THE STENCH OF BATTLE ABOUT YOU.
WE ALSO CAME WITH FRIENDS! WHERE ARE THEY? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH OUR DROIDS?!
DO NOT RAISE YOUR VOICE TO ME, YOUNG MALE. YOUR LIVES HANG BY A THIN ENOUGH THREAD AS IT IS.
YOUR..."FRIENDS"... ARE HERE--AND, LIKE YOU, THEY ARE UNHARMED. FOR THE MOMENT.
MASTER LUKE! OH, THANK THE MAKER-- IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
SEE-THREEPIO! ARTOO-DETOO!
LUKE, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
THEY'RE BEING HELD IN SOME KIND OF STASIS LOCK. I'M GOING TO SEE IF THEY'RE ALL RIGHT!
WHREET! DEEDLE-BOOP!
ON SECOND THOUGHT, MAYBE I'LL JUST STAY RIGHT WHERE I AM.


AS HE BACKS AWAY FROM THE DROIDS, LUKE THINKS OF HAN SOLO...
...AND OF THE SACRIFICE THE DASHING SMUGGLER MADE TO SEE HIS FRIENDS SAFELY AWAY IN THE LIFEBOAT...
WE SHOULD HAVE STAYED WITH YOU, HAN. WE'D BE NO WORSE OFF THAN WE ARE NOW.
EVEN IF I GOT MY LIGHTSABER -- AND LEIA HER BLASTER -- WE COULDN'T ESCAPE FROM THIS CITY WITHOUT A SHIP, OR ANTI-GRAVITY BELTS, OR WINGS.
PATRIARCH, COUNCILLORS, WE KNOW YOUR WORLD IS RESTRICTED. BUT BEFORE WE COULD MAKE PROPER DIPLOMATIC APPROACH...OUR SPACECRAFT WAS ATTACKED. OUR VIOLATIONS ARE UNINTENTIONAL.
ALL WE ASK IS SAFE TRANSPORT TO YOUR PLANETARY STARPORT. WE'LL BE OFF-PLANET AS SOON AS WE CAN BOOK PASSAGE.
AN ELOQUENT APPEAL -- PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA OF ALDERAAN!
BUT THIS IMPERIAL WARRANT SPEAKS JUST AS ELOQUENTLY, DOES IT NOT?
LEIA ORGANA, PRINCESS-SENATOR OF ALDERRAN
WANTED:
OR TREASON AGAIN THE EMPIRE
YOU ARE A LEADER OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE. YOU CRASHED BECAUSE IMPERIAL FORCES STATIONED IN THIS SYSTEM ATTACKED IN PERFORMANCE OF THEIR DUTY.
I SEE. WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH US, THEN?
YOU ARE ENEMIES OF THE IMPERIUM THE WINDBORN ARE SWORN TO SERVE. OUR DUTY REQUIRES THAT WE SURRENDER YOU IMMEDIATELY TO THE IMPERIAL LEGATE HERE.
THAT'S IT, THEN WE'RE AS GOOD AS DEAD.
YOUNG MALE, THIS WEAPON IS YOURS?
IT IS.
I WOULD KNOW YOUR NAME.
LUKE SKYWALKER.

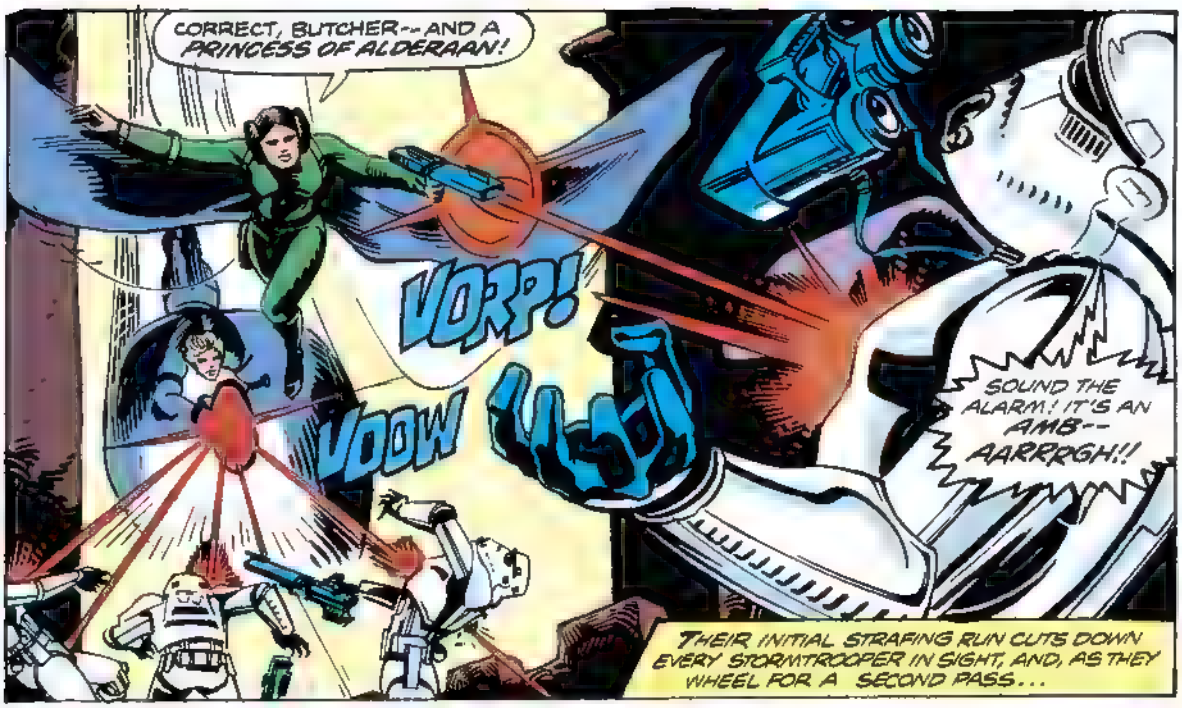
〈BY THE DAWN WIND, I THOUGHT THAT WEAPON LOOKED FAMILIAR.〉
〈IS HE THE ONE?〉
〈HIS NAME IS THE SAME AS OUR WINGLESS BLOOD BROTHER'S.〉
〈BUT HE IS SO YOUNG --AND VIRTUALLY ALONE! THE MAJESTRIX IS POWERFUL, WITH AN ARMY AT HER BACK!〉
〈YET, IF HE IS THE ONE, WE OWE HIM A DEBT THAT CAN NEVER BE REPAID. I WILL PUT FORWARD ONE FINAL TEST--ONE OF HONOR.〉
WHAT ARE THEY SAYING, LUKE?
〈THEN WE WILL DECIDE.〉
I WISH I KNEW I DON'T LIKE IT, THOUGH.
YOUR STARSHIP WAS ATTACKED AS IT NEARED OUR WORLD,
AND DESTROYED AFTER WE..., ABANDONED HER.
NOT SO. THE VESSEL WAS CAPTURED AND TAKEN INTACT TO THE MAJESTRIX' FORTRESS.
"INTACT?!" THEN--THAT MEANS HAN AND CHEWBACCA COULD STILL BE ALIVE!
WE DON'T KNOW THAT FOR SURE.
I DON'T CARE. IF THERE'S THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE THEY'RE ALIVE, WE'VE GOT TO TRY TO RESCUE THEM.
LUKE--YOU'RE CRAZY! YOU'RE GOING TO BREAK INTO AN IMPERIAL STRONGHOLD, TAKE ON LORD KNOWS HOW MANY STORMTROOPERS, TO SAVE TWO PEOPLE WHO ARE PROBABLY ALREADY DEAD?!
YES.
THEN I MUST BE CRAZY, TOO--
--BECAUSE I'M GOING WITH YOU.
〈PRAISE THE SACRED WINDS--HE IS THE ONE!〉
〈AS THE PROPHECY FORETOLD--WITH HIS HELP, THE S'KYTRI MAY ONCE MORE FLY FREE!〉
HEAR AND HEED THE WORDS OF THE COUNCIL! WE PROCLAIM LUKE SKYWALKER AND LEIA ORGANA--FRIENDS OF THE S'KYTRI.
WHAT AID WE CAN GIVE IS THEIRS FOR THE ASKING.

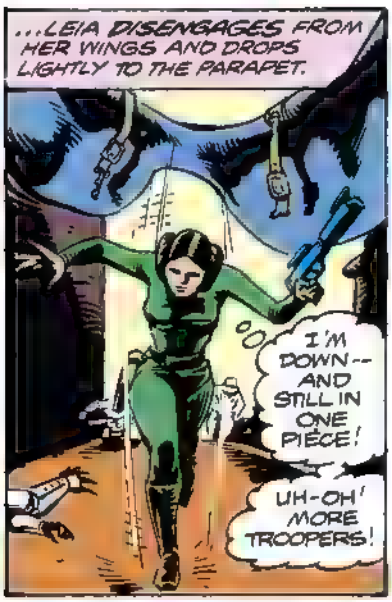
ELSEWHERE...
...ATOP THE HIGHEST PEAK IN THIS MOST AWESOME OF MOUNTAIN RANGES...
...STANDS THE FORTRESS-KEEP OF KHARYS, MATRIARCH OF THE S'KYTRI--SELF-PROCLAIMED MAJESTRIX OF SKYE.
UNDER HER DIRECT COMMAND IS A FORCE OF STARSHIPS AND STORM-TROOPERS THAT MANY SECTOR GOVERNORS WOULD ENVY. EVEN SO, SHE CARES NOT A WHIT FOR THE EMPIRE SHE IS PLEDGED TO SERVE; SHE IS BOUND BY AN OLDER, DEEPER OBLIGATION, TO A MAN THAT MOST OF THE GALAXY HAS REASON TO FEAR--DARTH VADER.
THAT FURRY MISANTHROPE MAKES TOO MUCH NOISE, CAPTAIN. IT DISTURBS ME. SILENCE THE BEAST-- WITHOUT HARMING IT-- OR YOU WILL TAKE ITS PLACE.
UH. YES, MAJESTRIX.
HRRAWR!
CHEWIE, SHUT UP! YOU BOTHER THE NICE LADY!
AS GALLANT AS EVER, HAN SOLO.
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE LAST PARTED.
NOT LONG ENOUGH--
AND, AS EVER, YOUR MOUTH KEEPS GETTING YOU INTO TROUBLE.
WHAT'S THE POINT OF BEING NICE, KHARYS? YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME ANYWAY, RIGHT?
OF COURSE. BUT THERE ARE MYRIAD WAYS TO DIE, SOLO.
GNNNGNH!
SOME WOULD MAKE MY "SMOKE DEMON" SEEM QUITE PLEASANT BY COMPARISON.
YOU AND YOUR FELLOW CORRELLIANS PROVIDED ME A RARE, FINE HUNT, SOLO, BUT NOW THE HUNT IS ENDED.
BEFORE I TAKE YOUR LIFE, HOWEVER...


THERE ARE SOME THINGS I WOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR TRAVELLING COMPANIONS, PRINCESS LEIA AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE BOY WHO DESTROYED THE DEATH STAR, THE ONE YOU CALL LUKE.
WHAT ARE THEY TO YOU?
TO ME-- NOTHING. TO THE DARK LORD OF SITH, WHOM I SERVE, PERHAPS EVERY-THING.
NO ANSWER? WHAT A...PITY.
YOU FORCE ME TO RESORT TO THE TENDER MERCIES OF AN IMPERIAL INTERROGATOR.
HAN'S FACE PALES SLIGHTLY UNDER HIS SPACER'S TAN AS THE HUMMING, GLEAMING ORB MOVES TOWARDS HIM.
DARTH VADER USED A SIMILAR MACHINE ON LEIA WHEN SHE WAS HIS PRISONER ABOARD THE DEATH STAR.
SHE STILL REFUSES TO SPEAK OF WHAT HAPPENED. AND THE MEMORIES STILL GIVE HER NIGHTMARES.
MEANWHILE, UP ON THE FORTRESS' BATTLEMENTS...
CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD!
FLIERS, SIR-- SCORES OF 'EM! I'VE NEVER SEEN SO MANY!
HM-- THEY'RE HIGHLAND CLANS, BY THEIR MARKINGS. LED BY ARAGH HIMSELF, TOO. PROBABLY TAKING SOME HATCHLINGS OUT FOR THEIR INITIATION HUNT.
BUT ALERT THE GARRISON-- AND THE MAJESTRIX-- JUST IN CASE.

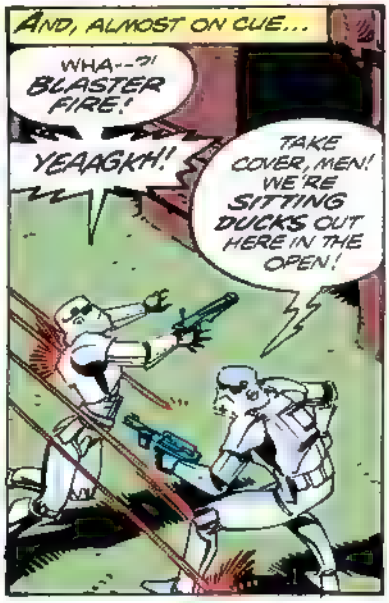
YOU KNOW, LUKE, IF I WEREN'T SO SCARED, I'D BE HAVING THE TIME OF MY LIFE RIGHT NOW.
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.
OUR ANTI-GRAV BELT PACKS KEEP US ALOFT, BUT THESE WINGS GET US WHERE WE WANT TO GO. JUST LIKE THE S'KYTRI, WE HAVE TO FOLLOW THE WINDS, RIDE THE AIR CURRENTS AND THERMALS, WATCH OUT FOR DOWNDRAFTS.
THE DIFFERENCE IS, THEY'VE HAD A WHOLE LIFETIME TO PRACTICE. WE'VE ONLY HAD A DAY.
THESE BODY-SUITS SHOULD DISGUISE US UNTIL WE'RE RIGHT ON TOP OF THE CASTLE.
THE CLANS HAVE COME AS FAR AS WE CAN, GIVEN WHAT ASSISTANCE WE CAN. I AM SORRY, SKYWALKER, BUT YOU TWO MUST WIN OR LOSE YOUR FIGHT... ALONE.

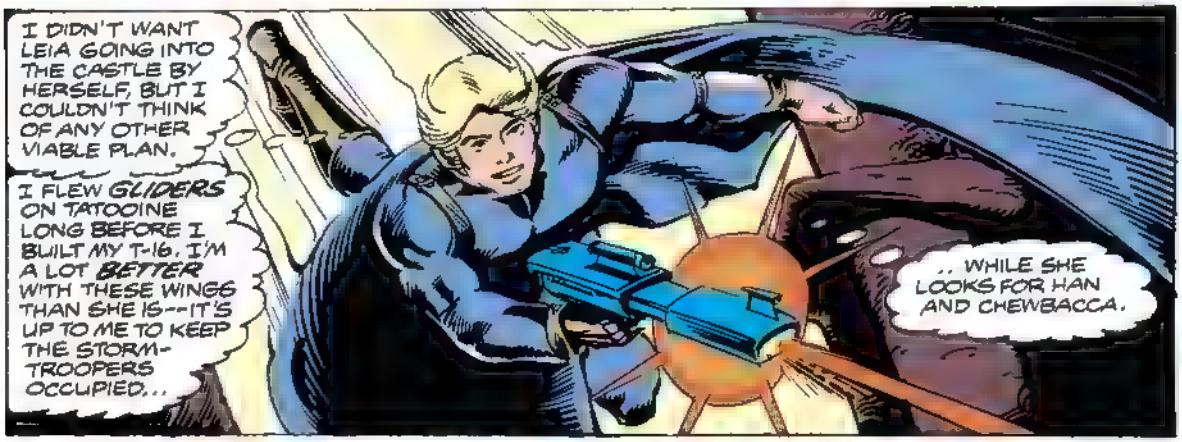
GREAT.
READY, LEIA?
NOT REALLY --BUT DO I HAVE A CHOICE?
MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU.
SHE SCREAMS, HER WINGS FOLDING IN ON THEM-SELVES...
...AND THEN, SHE FALLS.
WHAT IS IT, CAPTAIN?
ONE OF 'EM'S HIT A DOWN-DRAFT. HER MATE'S TRYING TO SAVE HER.
A KILOBUCK SAYS HE DOESN'T MAKE IT.
YOU'RE ON. ANYONE ELSE WANT TO BET?
BY THE ETERNAL-- SHE'S NO FLIER!
SHE'S HUMAN!

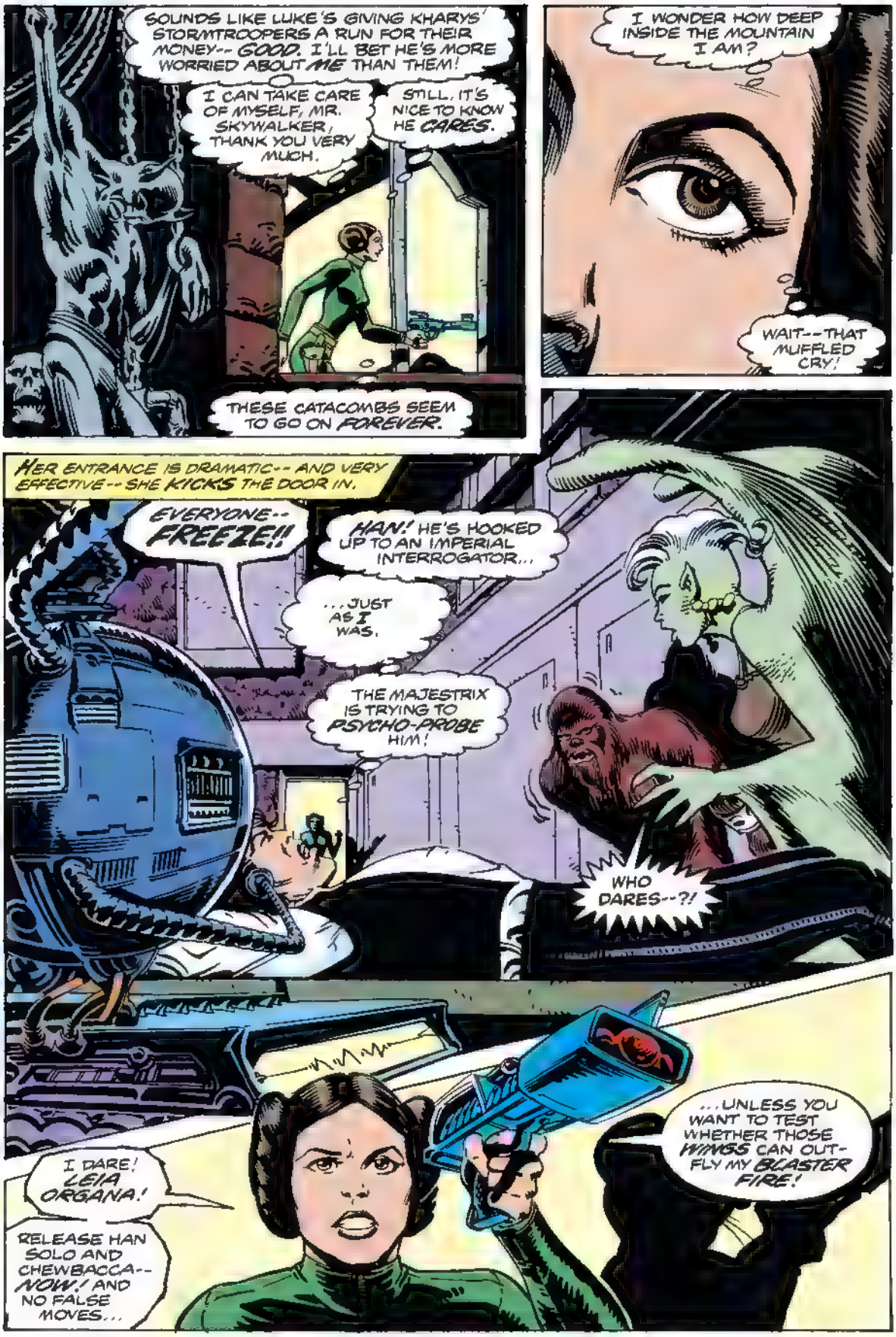

CORRECT, BUTCHER--AND A PRINCESS OF ALDERAAN!
VORP!
VOOW
SOUND THE ALARM! IT'S AN AMB-- AARRRGH!!
THEIR INITIAL STRAFING RUN CUTS DOWN EVERY STORMTROOPER IN SIGHT, AND, AS THEY WHEEL FOR A SECOND PASS...

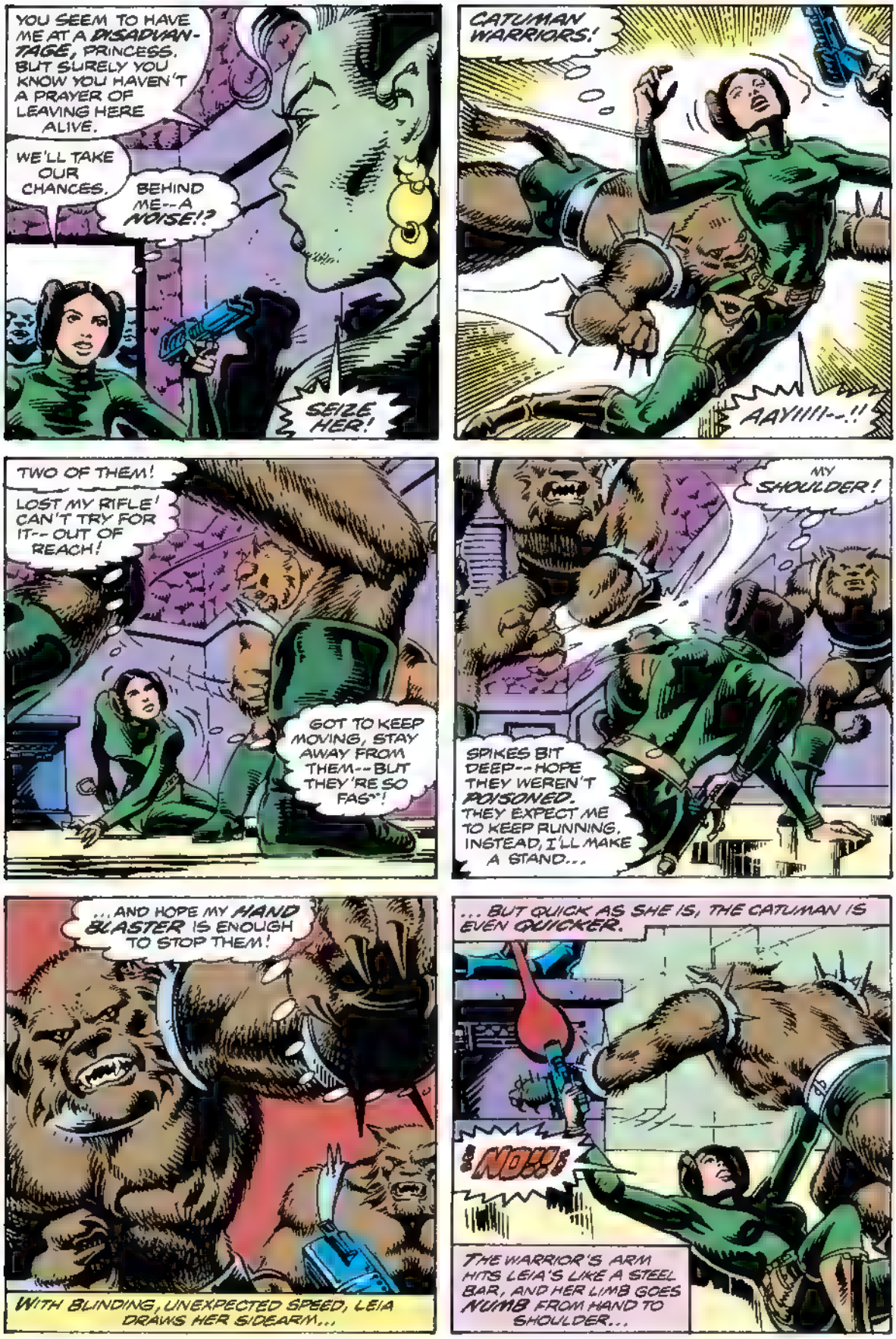

...LEIA DISENGAGES FROM HER WINGS AND DROPS LIGHTLY TO THE PARAPET.
I'M DOWN-- AND STILL IN ONE PIECE!
UH-OH! MORE TROOPERS!

BLAST! I'M PINNED DOWN!
IF LUKE DOESN'T GET THESE KILLERS OFF MY BACK, OUR GREAT ESCAPE WILL BE OVER BEFORE IT'S EVEN BEGUN!


AND, ALMOST ON CUE...
WHA--?! BLASTER FIRE!
YEAAGKH!
TAKE COVER, MEN! WE'RE SITTING DUCKS OUT HERE IN THE OPEN!


I DIDN'T WANT LEIA GOING INTO THE CASTLE BY HERSELF, BUT I COULDN'T THINK OF ANY OTHER VIABLE PLAN.
I FLEW GLIDERS ON TATOOINE LONG BEFORE I BUILT MY T-16. I'M A LOT BETTER WITH THESE WINGS THAN SHE IS--IT'S UP TO ME TO KEEP THE STORM-TROOPERS OCCUPIED...
.. WHILE SHE LOOKS FOR HAN AND CHEWBACCA.

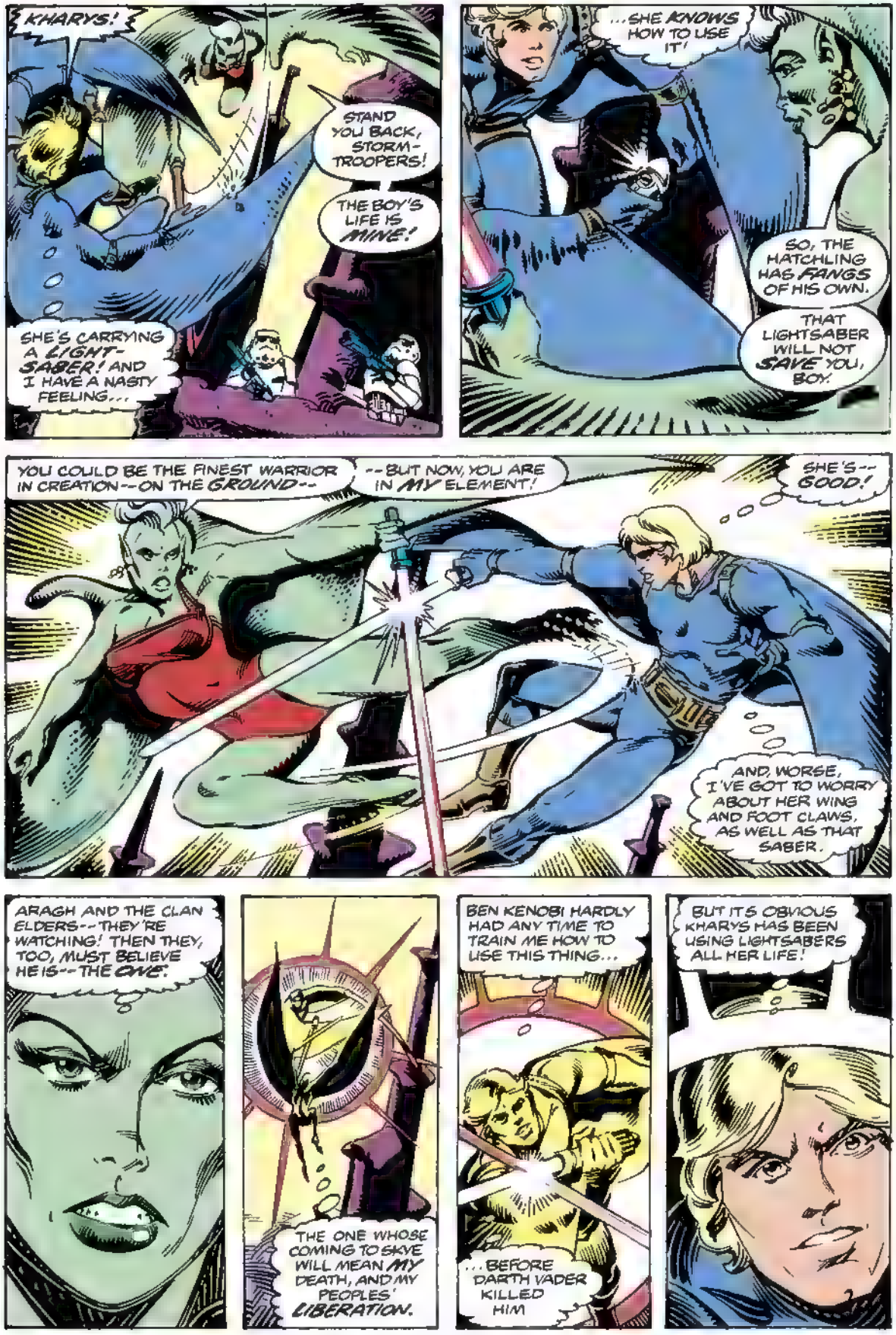

SOUNDS LIKE LUKE'S GIVING KHARYS' STORMTROOPERS A RUN FOR THEIR MONEY-- GOOD. I'LL BET HE'S MORE WORRIED ABOUT ME THAN THEM!
I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF, MR. SKYWALKER, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
STILL, IT'S NICE TO KNOW HE CARES.
THESE CATACOMBS SEEM TO GO ON FOREVER.
I WONDER HOW DEEP INSIDE THE MOUNTAIN I AM?
WAIT--THAT MUFFLED CRY!
HER ENTRANCE IS DRAMATIC-- AND VERY EFFECTIVE-- SHE KICKS THE DOOR IN.
EVERYONE-- FREEZE!!
HAN! HE'S HOOKED UP TO AN IMPERIAL INTERROGATOR...
...JUST AS I WAS.
THE MAJESTRIX IS TRYING TO PSYCHO-PROBE HIM!
WHO DARES--?!
I DARE! LEIA ORGANA!
RELEASE HAN SOLO AND CHEWBACCA-- NOW! AND NO FALSE MOVES...
...UNLESS YOU WANT TO TEST WHETHER THOSE WINGS CAN OUT-FLY MY BLASTER FIRE!

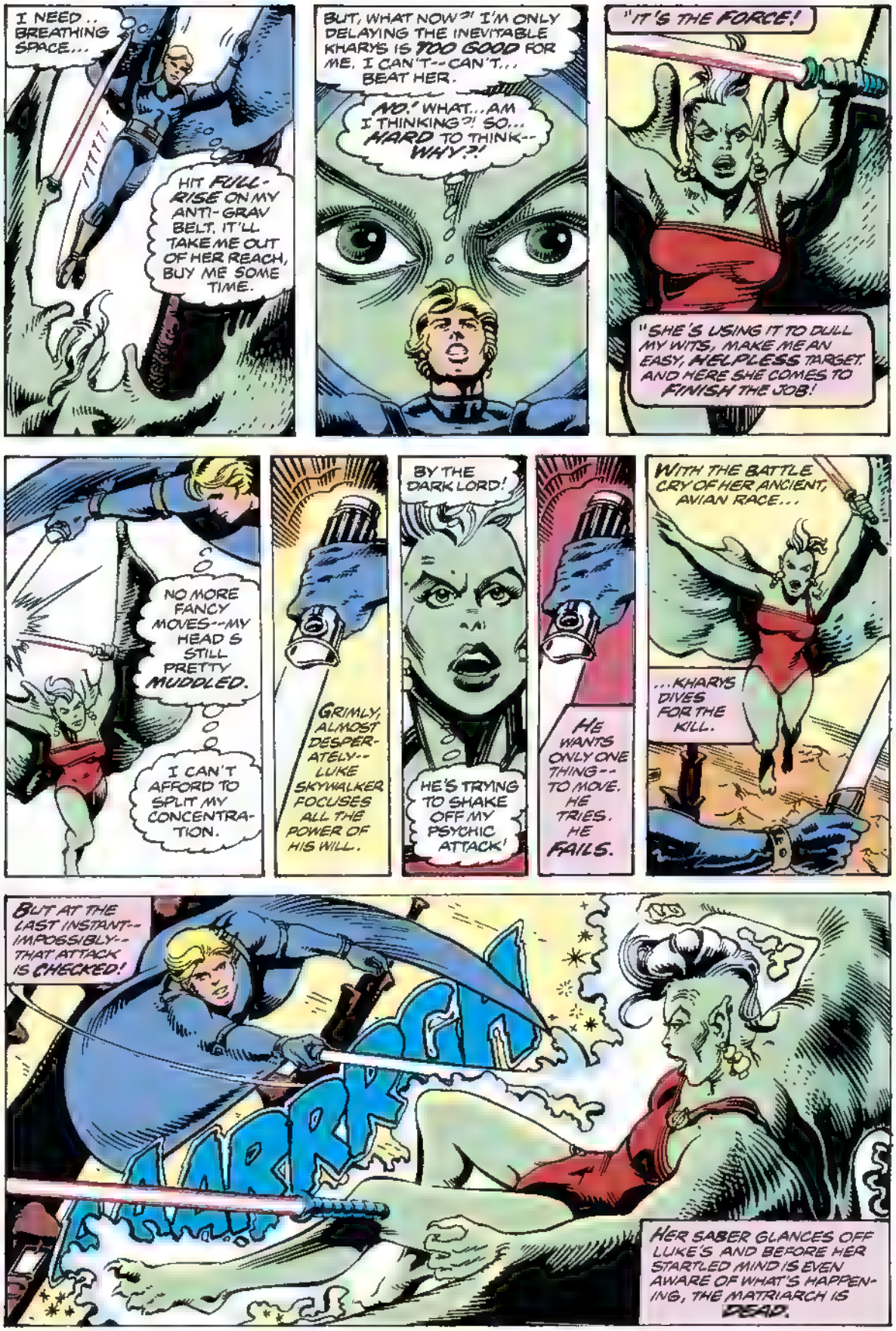

YOU SEEM TO HAVE ME AT A DISADVANTAGE, PRINCESS. BUT SURELY YOU KNOW YOU HAVEN'T A PRAYER OF LEAVING HERE ALIVE.
WE'LL TAKE OUR CHANCES.
BEHIND ME--A NOISE!?
SEIZE HER!
CATUMAN WARRIORS!
AAYIIII--.!!
TWO OF THEM!
LOST MY RIFLE! CAN'T TRY FOR IT-- OUT OF REACH!
GOT TO KEEP MOVING, STAY AWAY FROM THEM--BUT THEY'RE SO FAS*!
MY SHOULDER!
SPIKES BIT DEEP--HOPE THEY WEREN'T POISONED. THEY EXPECT ME TO KEEP RUNNING, INSTEAD, I'LL MAKE A STAND...
...AND HOPE MY HAND BLASTER IS ENOUGH TO STOP THEM!
WITH BLINDING, UNEXPECTED SPEED, LEIA DRAWS HER SIDEARM...
...BUT QUICK AS SHE IS, THE CATUMAN IS EVEN QUICKER.
NO!!
THE WARRIOR'S ARM HITS LEIA'S LIKE A STEEL BAR, AND HER LIMB GOES NUMB FROM HAND TO SHOULDER...

THE STUNNING IMPACT SENDS THE HAND-GUN FLYING AGAIN, LEIA DOES THE UNEXPECTED, RAKING HER NAILS DOWN THE CATUMAN'S FACE...
BOK!
...BEFORE KICKING AWAY FROM HIM WITH ALL HER STRENGTH.
THE "CATS" ARE OFF-BALANCE. THEY UNDERESTIMATED ME, THOUGHT I'D BE AN EASY KILL.
NOT A BIG ADVANTAGE. BUT IN COMBAT,.. EVEN A SMALL ONE CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE SHE FIRES AS SHE ROLLS...
...THE THIN, SCARLET BEAM CUTTING A DEADLY SWATHE ACROSS THE VAST CHAMBER. ONE CATUMAN DUCKS HER SHOT. HIS BROODMATE ISN'T SO LUCKY.
YAHHRRP
HRRR
ZRAKT
AS HE DIES, HE TWIST-FALLS BACKWARDS INTO THE FORCE FIELD HOLDING CHEWBACCA--A COMPLEMENT TO THE MANACLES CLAMPED TIGHT AROUND THE WOOKIEE'S WRISTS. THE FIELD SHORTS OUT.
THE SUPPOSEDLY "UNBREAKABLE" MANACLES RESTRAIN CHEWIE FOR ALL OF A SECOND LONGER.
AS THE SURVIVING CATUMAN LUNGES TOWARDS LEIA, THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S FIRST MATE DIVES FOR HIM.

THE FIGHT IS NO CONTEST.
SHOULDER SLASH IS MESSY, BUT I DON'T THINK IT'S SERIOUS. I CAN STILL MOVE MY ARM FAIRLY EASILY.
NO SIGN OF KHARYS-- TOO BAD. WE HAVEN'T TIME TO SEARCH FOR HER, EITHER.
HEY, BEAUTIFUL... REMEMBER ME...?
HAN!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
NEVER FELT... BETTER.. YOUR REGALNESS.
CAN YOU WALK?
SHOW ME SOME PROFIT IN IT AND I'LL RUN A MARATHON.
SURE YOU WILL
CHEWBACCA, CARRY HIM. AND FOLLOW ME.
FUNNY. DON'T UNDERSTAND... WHY... LEGS FOLDED UP LIKE THAT.
THEY WORKED... FINE... THIS MORNING.
HEAR THOSE EXPLOSIONS, OL' BUDDY? SOUNDS LIKE THIS PLACE IS COMING APART AT THE SEAMS.
MY COMPLIMENTS, PRINCESS. THIS ESCAPE PLAN'S GOING SO WELL, YOU'D THINK IT WAS ONE OF MINE.
OH? ALL OF A SUDDEN, I'M WORRIED.

AM I DELIRIOUS, OR HAVE I JUST BEEN INSULTED?
DON'T SAY ANYTHING, CHEWIE... I THINK I KNOW THE ANSWER!
RARP
LEIA, WE'VE GOT TO GO WAY DEEPER TO REACH THE FALCON.
GOOD. THE FARTHER I AM FROM THOSE BLASTS, THE BETTER I LIKE IT.
MEANWHILE, ABOVE THE FORTRESS..
WHERE ARE THESE STORM-TROOPERS COMING FROM?!
SEEMS LIKE MORE IMPERIALS IN THIS CASTLE THAN WERE ON THE DEATH STAR!
ONE BOY?!
MY AERIE GUTTED AND RUINED BY ONE-- WINSLESS-- BOY?!?
I CURSE THE DAY I ALLIED MYSELF WITH THOSE ARMORED IDIOTS. SCORES OF THEM ARE DEAD, WHILE THE YOUTH REMAINS UN-TOUCHED!
THE FORCE IS STRONG IN HIM.
IT REMINDS ME OF-- BY THE GREAT WIND, THE PROPHECY! CAN HE BE-- THE ONE?! IF SO, IT IS EVEN MORE IMPERATIVE-- FOR VADER'S SAKE AS WELL AS MY OWN-- THAT HE DIE!
FORMIDABLE THOUGH HE SEEMS TO BE--
-- THIS BOY WILL MEET HIS MATCH, AND MORE, IN KHARYS!
KTANG
YOW!
SHIK!
THROWING STARS! BARELY DODGED 'EM! BUT WHO--?!
UH-OH!


KHARYS!
STAND YOU BACK, STORM-TROOPERS!
THE BOY'S LIFE IS MINE!
SHE'S CARRYING A LIGHT-SABER! AND I HAVE A NASTY FEELING...
...SHE KNOWS HOW TO USE IT!
SO, THE HATCHLING HAS FANGS OF HIS OWN.
THAT LIGHTSABER WILL NOT SAVE YOU, BOY!
YOU COULD BE THE FINEST WARRIOR IN CREATION--ON THE GROUND--
--BUT NOW, YOU ARE IN MY ELEMENT!
SHE'S--GOOD!
AND, WORSE, I'VE GOT TO WORRY ABOUT HER WING AND FOOT CLAWS, AS WELL AS THAT SABER.
ARAGH AND THE CLAN ELDERS--THEY'RE WATCHING! THEN THEY, TOO, MUST BELIEVE HE IS--THE ONE!
THE ONE WHOSE COMING TO SKYE WILL MEAN MY DEATH, AND MY PEOPLES' LIBERATION.
BEN KENOBI HARDLY HAD ANY TIME TO TRAIN ME HOW TO USE THIS THING...
...BEFORE DARTH VADER KILLED HIM
BUT IT'S OBVIOUS KHARYS HAS BEEN USING LIGHTSABERS ALL HER LIFE!


I NEED .. BREATHING SPACE...
HIT FULL-RISE ON MY ANTI-GRAV BELT. IT'LL TAKE ME OUT OF HER REACH, BUY ME SOME TIME.
BUT, WHAT NOW?! I'M ONLY DELAYING THE INEVITABLE KHARYS IS TOO GOOD FOR ME. I CAN'T--CAN'T... BEAT HER.
NO! WHAT...AM I THINKING?! SO... HARD TO THINK-- WHY?!
"IT'S THE FORCE!
"SHE'S USING IT TO DULL MY WITS, MAKE ME AN EASY, HELPLESS TARGET. AND HERE SHE COMES TO FINISH THE JOB!
NO MORE FANCY MOVES--MY HEAD S STILL PRETTY MUDDLED.
I CAN'T AFFORD TO SPLIT MY CONCENTRATION.
GRIMLY, ALMOST DESPERATELY-- LUKE SKYWALKER FOCUSES ALL THE POWER OF HIS WILL.
BY THE DARK LORD!
HE'S TRYING TO SHAKE OFF MY PSYCHIC ATTACK!
HE WANTS ONLY ONE THING-- TO MOVE. HE TRIES. HE FAILS.
WITH THE BATTLE CRY OF HER ANCIENT, AVIAN RACE...
...KHARYS DIVES FOR THE KILL.
BUT AT THE LAST INSTANT-- IMPOSSIBLY-- THAT ATTACK IS CHECKED!
ARRK
HER SABER GLANCES OFF LUKE'S AND BEFORE HER STARTLED MIND IS EVEN AWARE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING, THE MATRIARCH IS DEAD.

IT TOOK EVERYTHING I HAD TO PRETEND I WAS STILL FROZEN-- BUT I HAD TO DECOY HER IN CLOSE
I HAD TO BE SURE I WOULDN'T MISS.
FUNNY-- I THOUGHT I'D FEEL GOOD ABOUT WINNING THIS FIGHT. BUT I DON'T. I FEEL... SOMEHOW SAD.
LATER, AFTER THE WINGED CLANS OF S'KYTRI HAVE MADE SHORT WORK OF THE AERIE'S IMPERIAL GARRISON, AND THE MILLENNIUM FALCON IS ONCE MORE READIED FOR SPACE...
WE ARE NO LONGER BOUND BY OUR OATH-- THANKS TO SKYWALKER. IF ANY IMPERIALS COME SEEKING VENGEANCE FOR THEIR SLAIN COMRADES, THEY WILL FIND THE WINDBORN WAITING FOR THEM.
ARAGH, I'VE HEARD YOUR PEOPLE REFER TO LUKE AS "THE ONE." ONE WHAT? WHAT DO THEY MEAN BY THAT?
"YEARS AGO, MY FRIEND, DURING WHAT YOU HUMANS CALLED THE 'CLONE WARS,' THREE JEDI KNIGHTS SAVED SKYE FROM DESTRUCTION. ONE WAS OBI-WAN KENOBI; THE OTHERS, HIS PUPILS. IN GRATITUDE, WE SWORE ETERNAL FRIENDSHIP AND FEALTY TO THEM.
"MUCH LATER, ONE OF THE PUPILS RETURNED. HE TOLD US THAT OBI-WAN AND THE JEDI WERE DESTROYED-- BY HIS HAND-- THEN, HE INVOKED OUR OATH AND MADE SKYE AN IMPERIAL SATRAPY, TO BE RULED IN HIS NAME BY KHARYS, TO WHOM HE GAVE A PORTION OF HIS KNOWLEDGE AND POWERS. THAT... MAN WAS DARTH VADER."
AND OBI-WAN'S OTHER PUPIL, WHO WAS HE?
YOUNG ONE...
YOU WEAR HIS SABER.
LUKE, IS ANYTHING THE MATTER?
I'M FINE, PRINCESS. HONEST. I'VE JUST GOT SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT...
...SOME MEMORIES TO CHERISH.
YOU LOOK SO.. STRANGE.
"I NEVER KNEW MY FATHER, BUT I KNOW NOW... THAT HE WAS A MAN TO BE PROUD OF.
"I HOPE I CAN BE HALF AS GOOD."
FIN.

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JAN
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STAR WARS
™
LUKE DEFIES THE EMPIRE ON HIS HOMEWORLD!
RETURN TO TATOOINE!
INFANTINO/ WACKER

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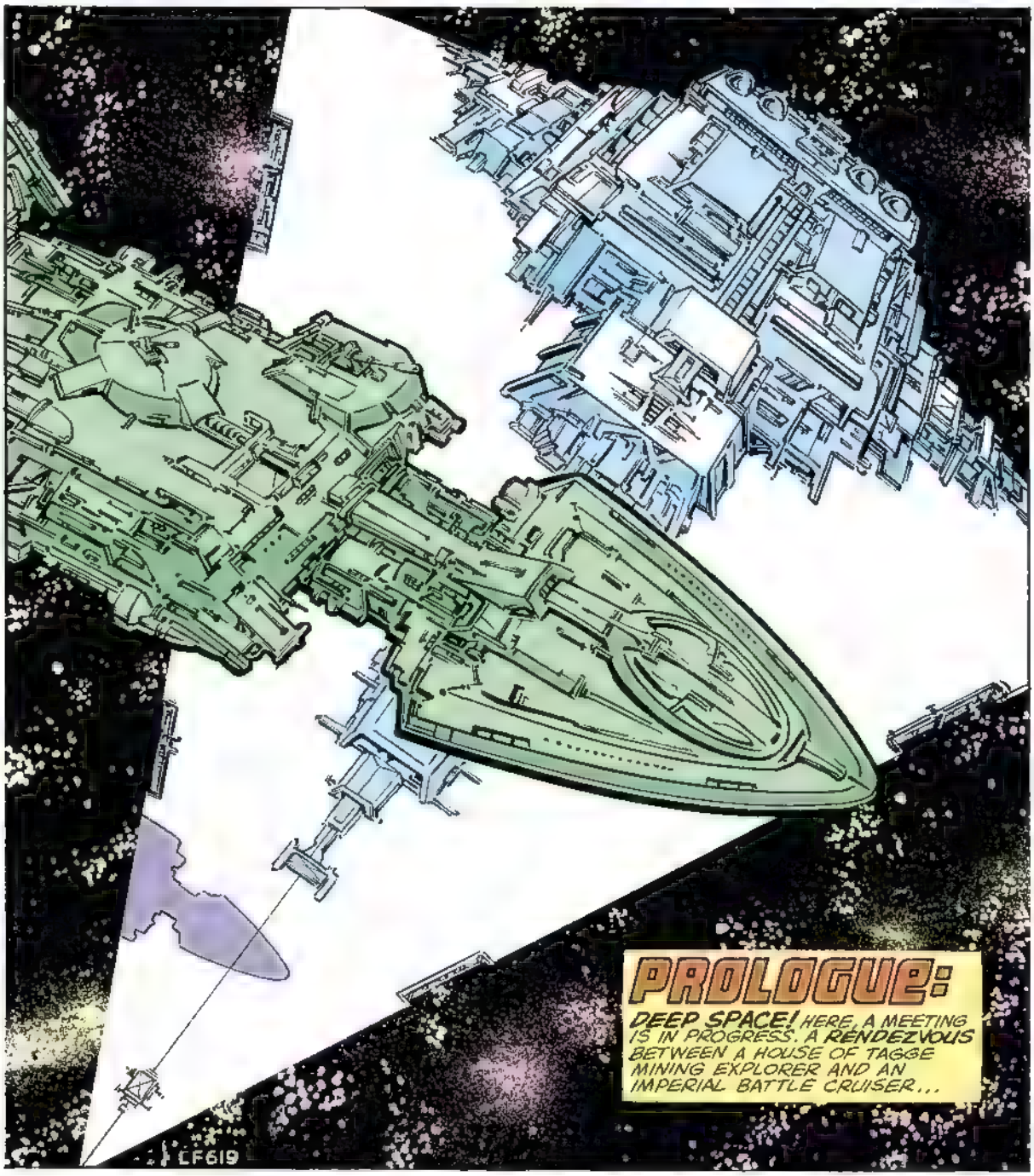
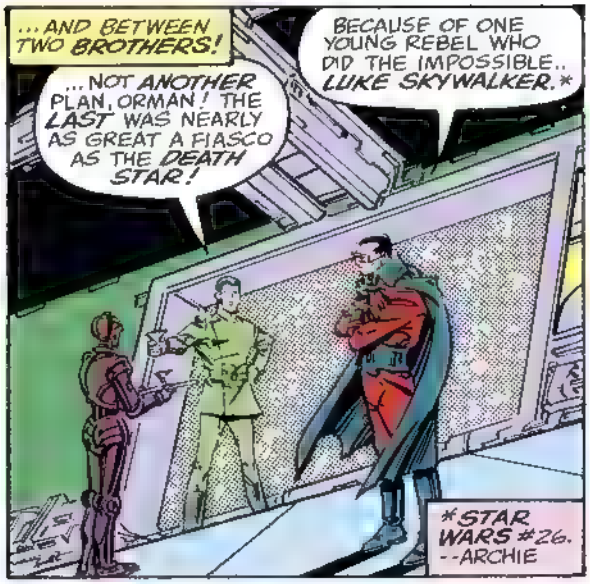
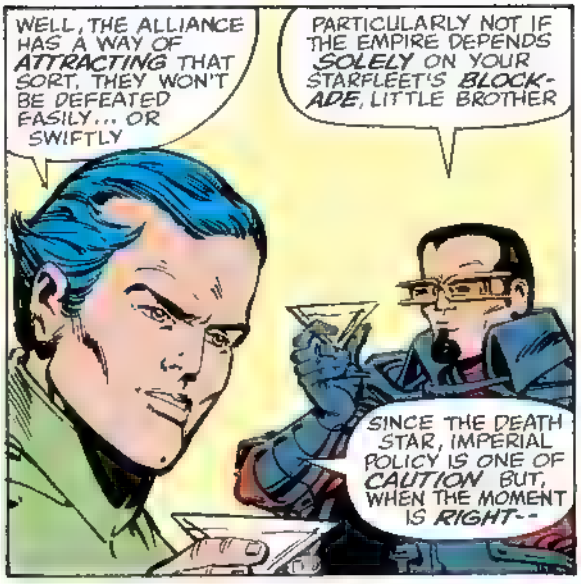
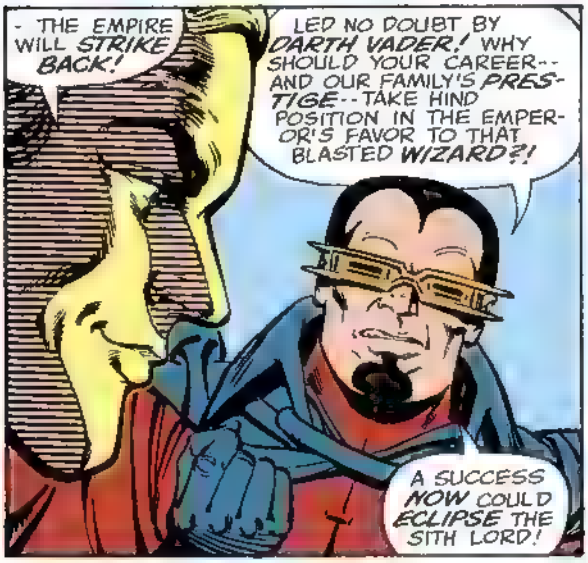
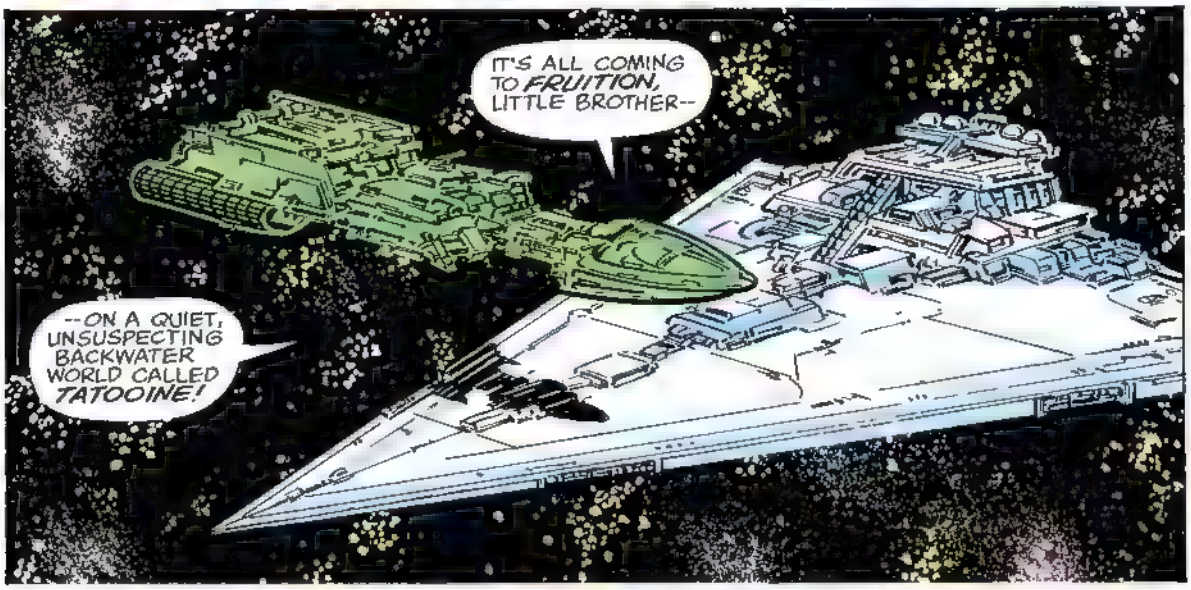

PROLOGUE:
DEEP SPACE! HERE, A MEETING IS IN PROGRESS. A RENDEZVOUS BETWEEN A HOUSE OF TAGGE MINING EXPLORER AND AN IMPERIAL BATTLE CRUISER...
LF619


...AND BETWEEN TWO BROTHERS!
BECAUSE OF ONE YOUNG REBEL WHO DID THE IMPOSSIBLE.. LUKE SKYWALKER.*
...NOT ANOTHER PLAN, ORMAN! THE LAST WAS NEARLY AS GREAT A FIASCO AS THE DEATH STAR!
*STAR WARS #26. --ARCHIE

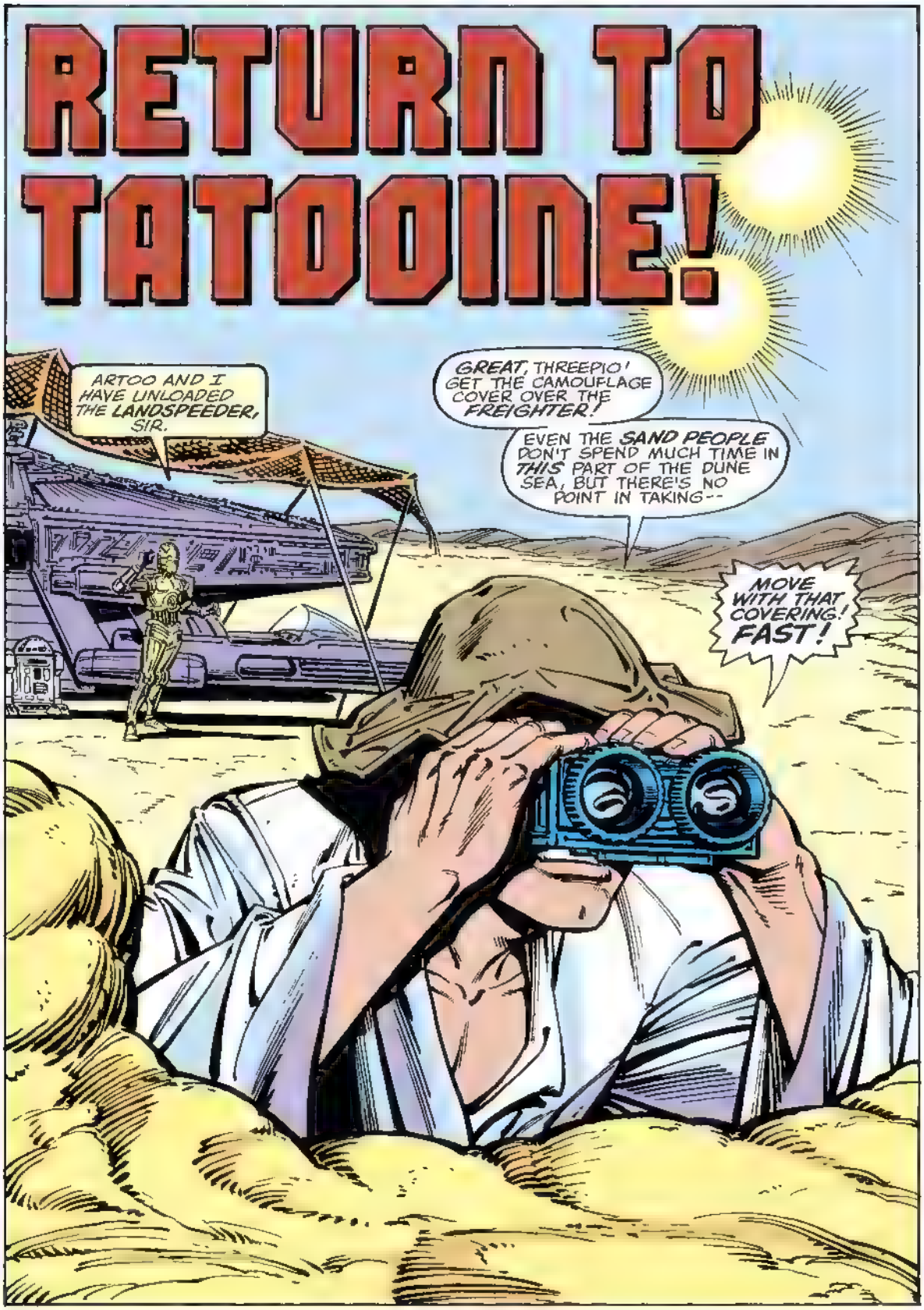

WELL, THE ALLIANCE HAS A WAY OF ATTRACTING THAT SORT, THEY WON'T BE DEFEATED EASILY... OR SWIFTLY
PARTICULARLY NOT IF THE EMPIRE DEPENDS SOLELY ON YOUR STARFLEET'S BLOCK-ADE, LITTLE BROTHER
SINCE THE DEATH STAR, IMPERIAL POLICY IS ONE OF CAUTION BUT, WHEN THE MOMENT IS RIGHT--


- THE EMPIRE WILL STRIKE BACK!
LED NO DOUBT BY DARTH VADER! WHY SHOULD YOUR CAREER-- AND OUR FAMILY'S PRES-TIGE--TAKE HIND POSITION IN THE EMPER-OR'S FAVOR TO THAT BLASTED WIZARD?!
A SUCCESS NOW COULD ECLIPSE THE SITH LORD!

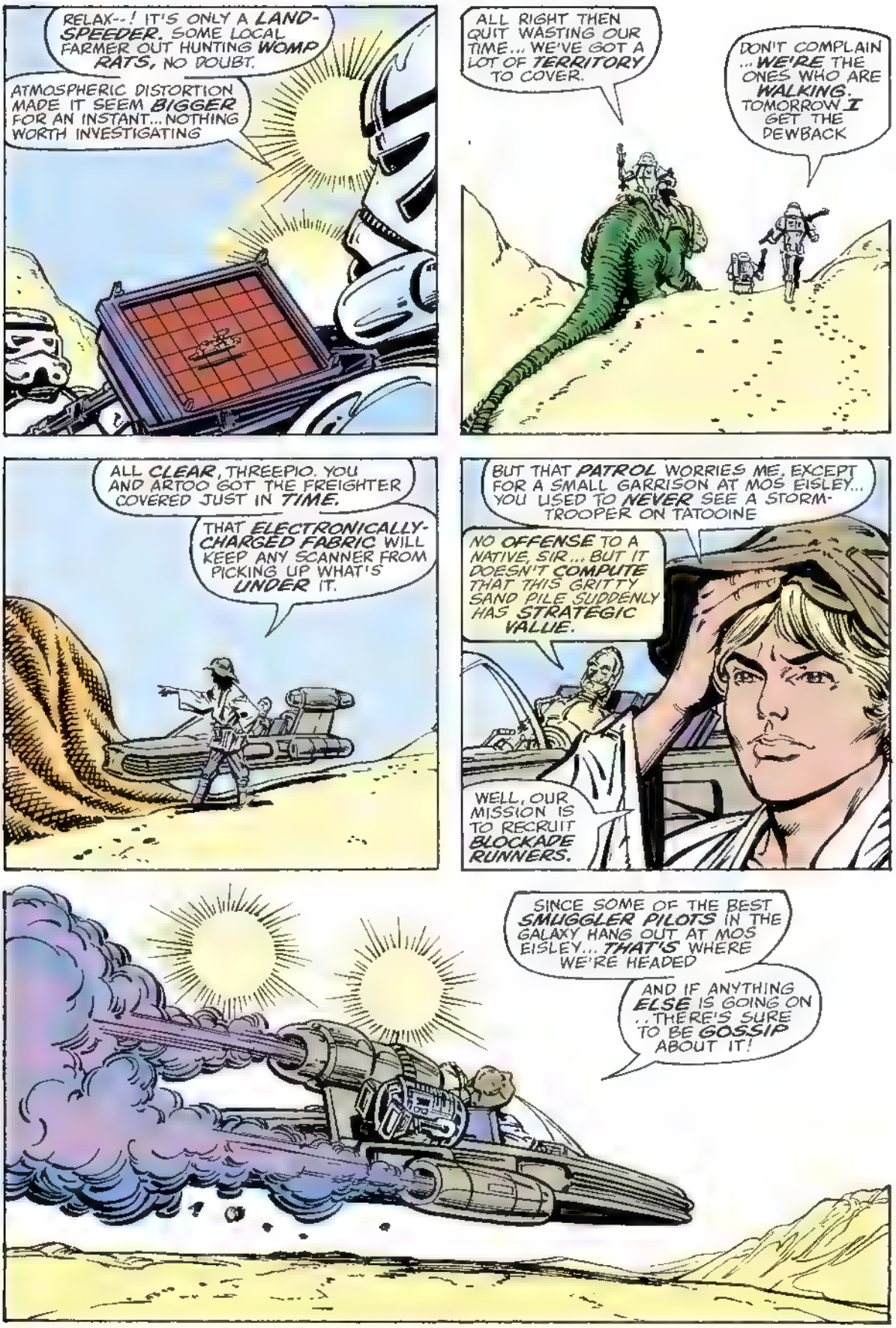
HE'S DANGEROUS TO OPPOSE OPENLY, ORMAN. BUT... YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT.
I'M MOVING IN SECRET, ULRIC... USING THE HOUSE OF TAGGE'S GREAT SCIEN-TIFIC AND COMMERCIAL RESOURCES WITH YOU TO ASSURE CONTINUED MILI-TARY COOPERATION--
WE'LL HAVE REVENGE... AND MORE!

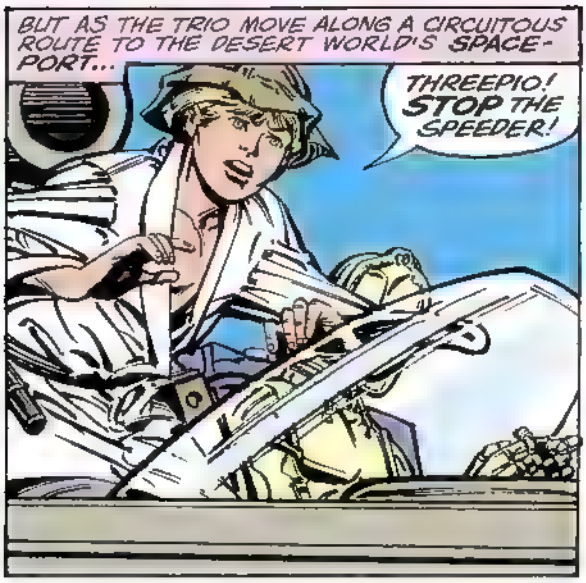

IT'S ALL COMING TO FRUITION, LITTLE BROTHER--
--ON A QUIET, UNSUSPECTING BACKWATER WORLD CALLED TATOOINE!

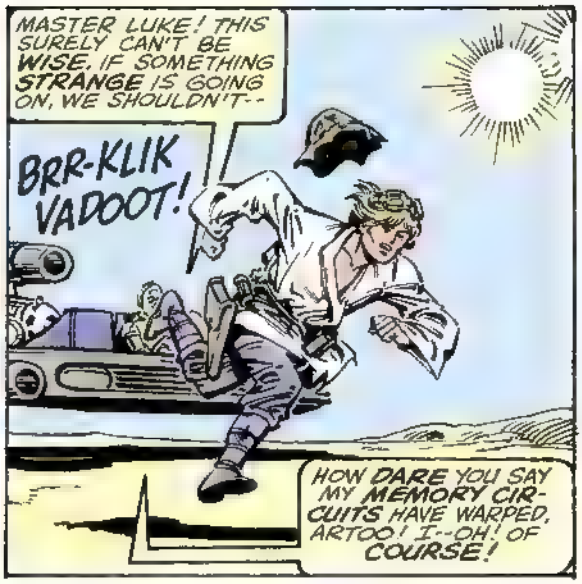
"IF THERE'S A BRIGHT **CENTER** TO THIS UNIVERSE, YOU'RE ON THE WORLD **FARTHEST** FROM IT" TO LUKE SKYWALKER, IT SEEMS **AGES** AGO THAT HE SPOKE THOSE WORDS ABOUT HIS HOME PLANET. IT FEELS AS IF HE WERE A DIFFERENT **PERSON** THAN THAT RESTLESS, INEXPERIENCED FARM BOY. NOW HE IS A **HERO**... AND A WARRIOR'S MISSION HAS BROUGHT HIM **BACK.**


RETURN TO TATOOINE!
ARTOO AND I HAVE UNLOADED THE LANDSPEEDER, SIR.
GREAT, THREEPIO! GET THE CAMOUFLAGE COVER OVER THE FREIGHTER!
EVEN THE SAND PEOPLE DON'T SPEND MUCH TIME IN THIS PART OF THE DUNE SEA, BUT THERE'S NO POINT IN TAKING--
MOVE WITH THAT COVERING! FAST!

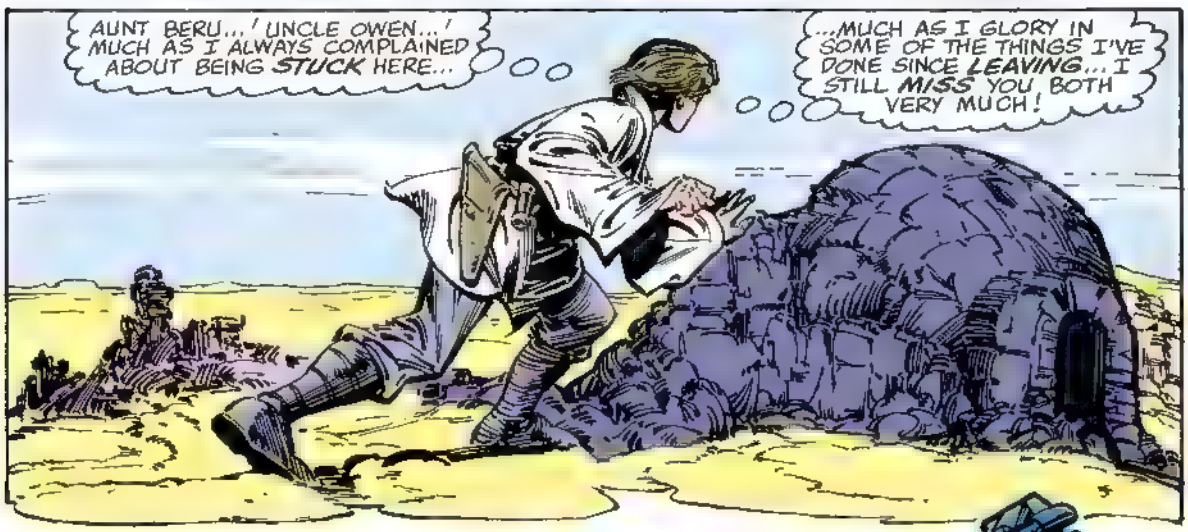
OH, DEAR! IT'S PROBABLY WILD BANTHAS..OR PERHAPS EVEN THOSE REPULSIVE LITTLE JAWAS!
I KNEW IT WAS A MISTAKE COMING BACK TO THIS FORSAKEN PLACE!
FREEPA BRUTT!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN IF I FEEL THAT WAY I SHOULDN'T HAVE VOLUNTEERED...?!
I COULDN'T TRUST A NON-LOGICAL RUST-POT LIKE YOU TO LOOK AFTER MASTER LUKE!
THREEPIO! THE COVER--!!
"--THERE'S AN IMPERIAL PATROL OUT ON THE FAR RIDGE!
"ONE OF THEM IS CARRYING A SCANNER PACK!"
KEEP YOUR MIND ON THE JOB. YOU DIDN'T SCAN THE SECTOR OFF ON OUR LEFT.
MY MIND IS ON THE FACT THAT ONE TIE FIGHTER COULD DO THE WORK OF TEN OF THESE PATROLS
AND ATTRACTS TEN TIMES THE ATTENTION. ORDERS ARE TO AVOID THAT.
ARE THEY AFRAID WE'LL UPSET THE LOCAL SAND LICE? THAT'S ABOUT ALL WE EVER--
WAIT! I'VE GOT SOMETHING--!

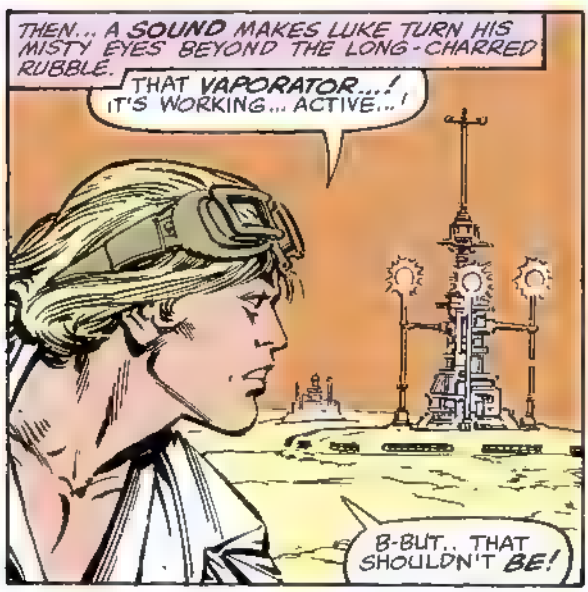

RELAX--! IT'S ONLY A LAND-SPEEDER. SOME LOCAL FARMER OUT HUNTING WOMP RATS, NO DOUBT.
ATMOSPHERIC DISTORTION MADE IT SEEM BIGGER FOR AN INSTANT... NOTHING WORTH INVESTIGATING
ALL RIGHT THEN QUIT WASTING OUR TIME... WE'VE GOT A LOT OF TERRITORY TO COVER.
DON'T COMPLAIN ...WE'RE THE ONES WHO ARE WALKING. TOMORROW I GET THE DEWBACK
ALL CLEAR, THREEPIO. YOU AND ARTOO GOT THE FREIGHTER COVERED JUST IN TIME.
THAT ELECTRONICALLY-CHARGED FABRIC WILL KEEP ANY SCANNER FROM PICKING UP WHAT'S UNDER IT.
BUT THAT PATROL WORRIES ME, EXCEPT FOR A SMALL GARRISON AT MOS EISLEY... YOU USED TO NEVER SEE A STORM-TROOPER ON TATOOINE
NO OFFENSE TO A NATIVE, SIR... BUT IT DOESN'T COMPUTE THAT THIS GRITTY SAND PILE SUDDENLY HAS STRATEGIC VALUE.
WELL, OUR MISSION IS TO RECRUIT BLOCKADE RUNNERS.
SINCE SOME OF THE BEST SMUGGLER PILOTS IN THE GALAXY HANG OUT AT MOS EISLEY... THAT'S WHERE WE'RE HEADED
AND IF ANYTHING ELSE IS GOING ON ..THERE'S SURE TO BE GOSSIP ABOUT IT!



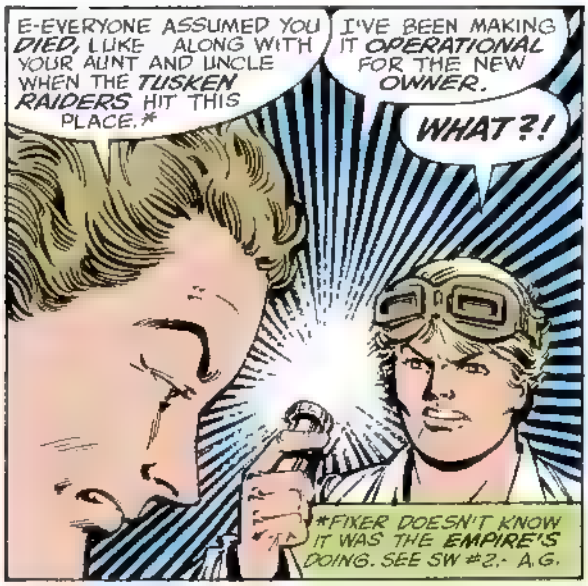

MASTER LUKE! THIS SURELY CAN'T BE WISE. IF SOMETHING STRANGE IS GOING ON, WE SHOULDN'T--
BRR-KLIK VADOOT!
HOW DARE YOU SAY MY MEMORY CIR-CUITS HAVE WARPED, ARTOO! I--OH! OF COURSE!

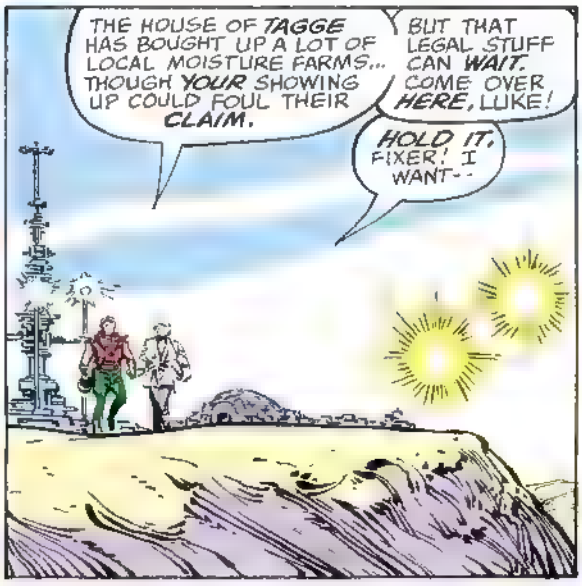
WHAT HAS DRAWN LUKE IS A **RUIN**... A RUIN ONCE THE MAIN BULDING OF A **MOISTURE FARM**. AND FOR MOST OF HIS TWENTY YEARS THAT FARM WAS LUKE SKYWALKER'S **HOME**.


AUNT BERU... / UNCLE OWEN... / MUCH AS I ALWAYS COMPLAINED ABOUT BEING STUCK HERE...
...MUCH AS I GLORY IN SOME OF THE THINGS I'VE DONE SINCE LEAVING... I STILL MISS YOU, BOTH VERY MUCH!


THEN... A SOUND MAKES LUKE TURN HIS MISTY EYES BEYOND THE LONG-CHARRED RUBBLE.
THAT VAPORATOR...! IT'S WORKING... ACTIVE...!
B-BUT.. THAT SHOULDN'T BE!

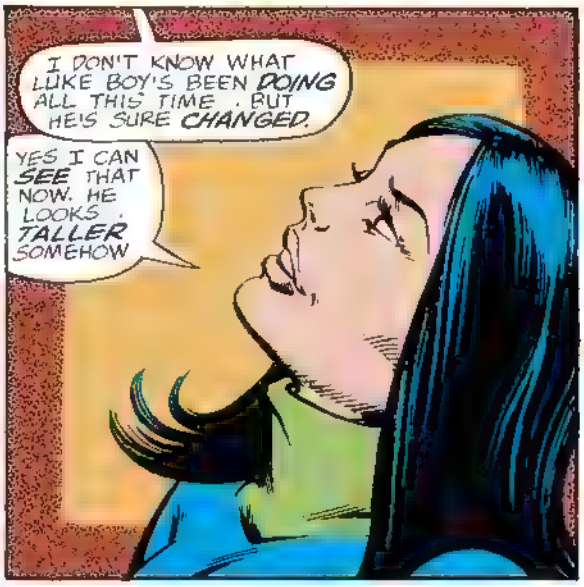
EASE YOUR BLASTER FROM ITS HOLSTER.. JUST USE TWO FINGERS.. THAT'S IT... !
NOW TOSS IT BACK TO ME.
LUKE OBEYS. BUT HE MAKES THE TOSS TOO HIGH...
. SO HIS CAPTOR'S EYES INADVERTANTLY FOLLOW IT, ONLY FOR AN INSTANT...
...BUT IN THAT INSTANT, HE SWIFTLY WHIRLS!
HAN SOLO TAUGHT ME ABOUT DISTRACTING A FOE--
SHHAAAK
--AND THE FAST LIGHT SABER WORK I LEARNED FROM OBI-WAN KENOBI! THAT'S TWO REASONS YOU'RE SUDDENLY ON THE WRONG END OF THIS FRACAS!
SUPPOSE YOU COME UP WITH ONE FOR WHY IT STARTED IN THE FIRST PLACE!
S-SKY-WALKER...?
FIXER! WHY AREN'T YOU AT TOSHI STATION REPAIRING EQUIPMENT INSTEAD OF OUT HERE AMBUSHING INNOCENT TRAVELLERS?!
I-I DON'T WORK AT THE STATION ANYMORE, LUKE. GOT A BETTER JOB... MORE FUTURE
AT LEAST... THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.

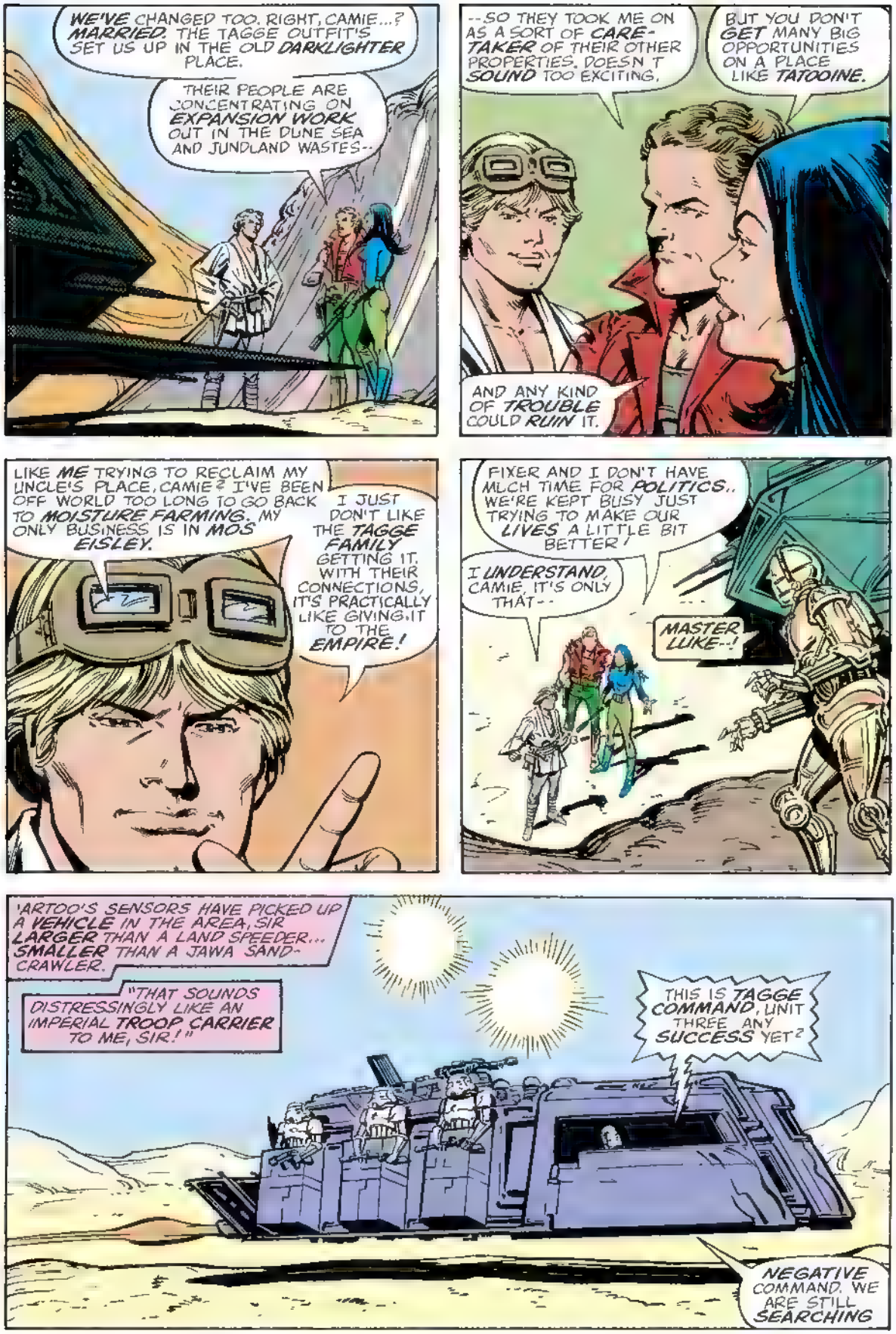

E-EVERYONE ASSUMED YOU DIED, LUKE ALONG WITH YOUR AUNT AND UNCLE WHEN THE TUSKEN RAIDERS HIT THIS PLACE.*
I'VE BEEN MAKING IT OPERATIONAL FOR THE NEW OWNER.
WHAT?!
*FIXER DOESN'T KNOW IT WAS THE EMPIRE'S DOING. SEE SW #2.- A.G.

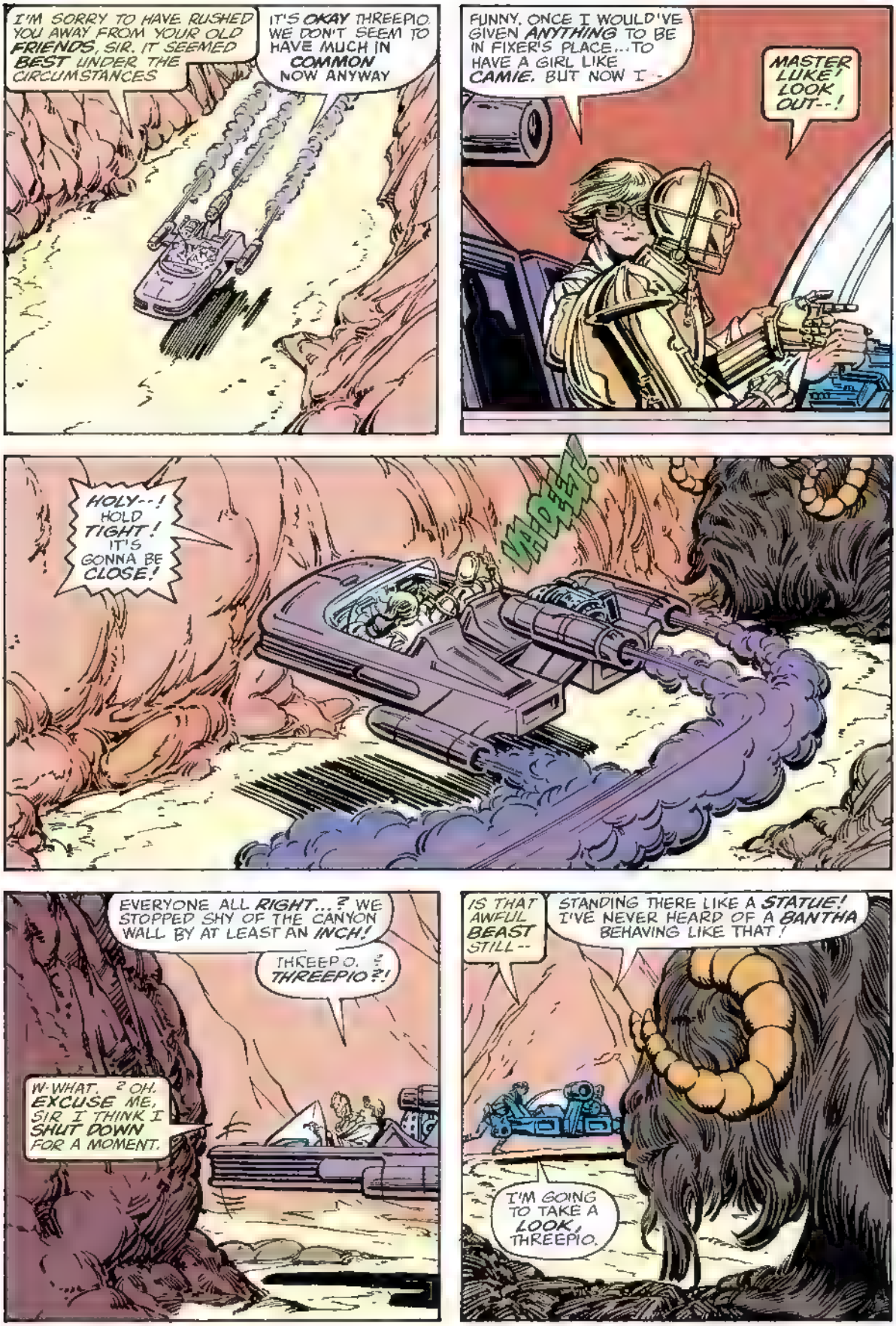

THE HOUSE OF TAGGE HAS BOUGHT UP A LOT OF LOCAL MOISTURE FARMS... THOUGH YOUR SHOWING UP COULD FOUL THEIR CLAIM.
BUT THAT LEGAL STUFF CAN WAIT. COME OVER HERE, LUKE!
HOLD IT, FIXER! I WANT--

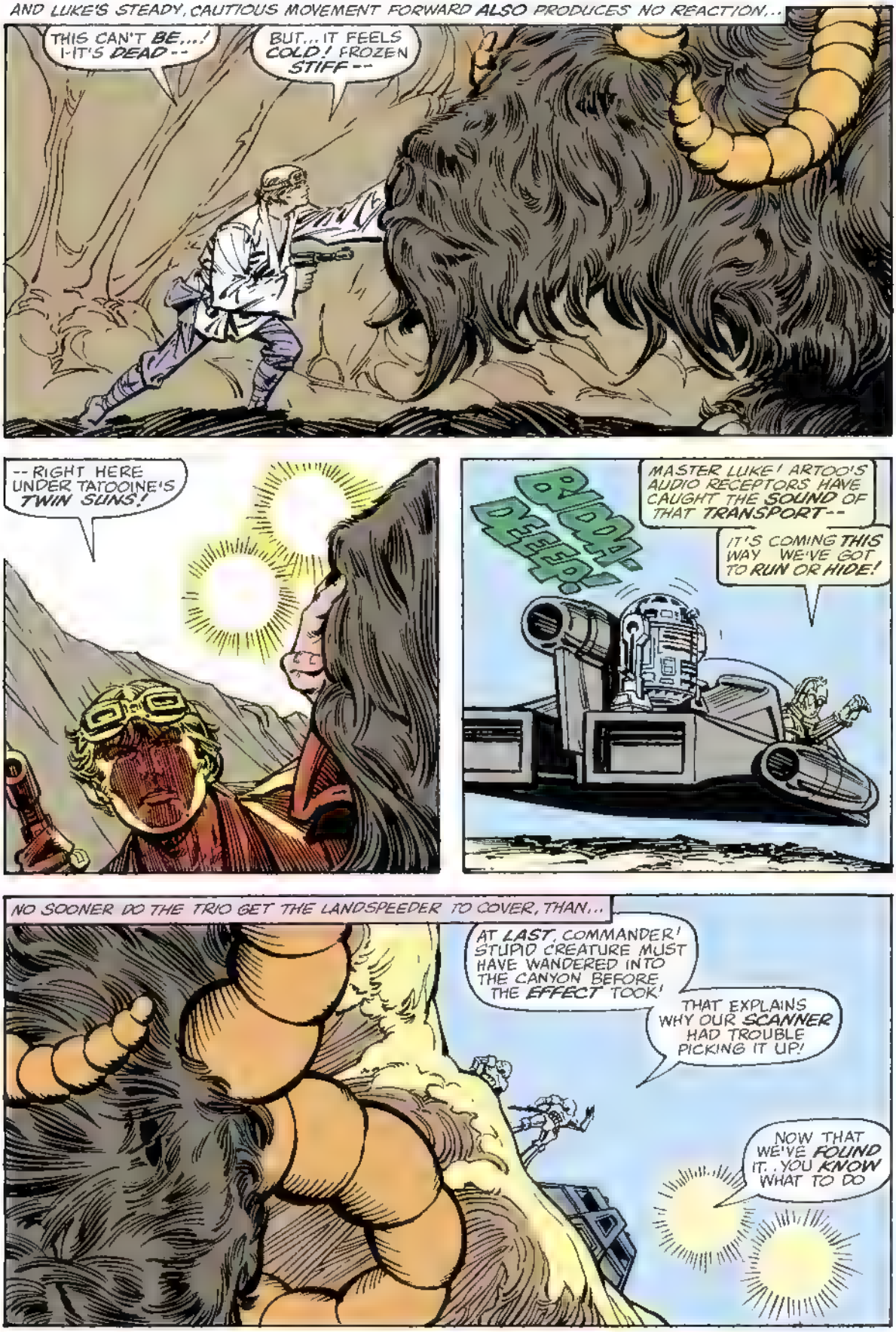
HEY, SWEETHEART! YOU CAN EASE UP GUARDING THE SKY HOPPER! INSTEAD OF A THIEVING PARTS SCAVENGER LIKE I EXPECTED TO CATCH--
...IT'S SKYWALKER... BACK FROM THE DEAD!
NOT LITTLE WORMIE...?!

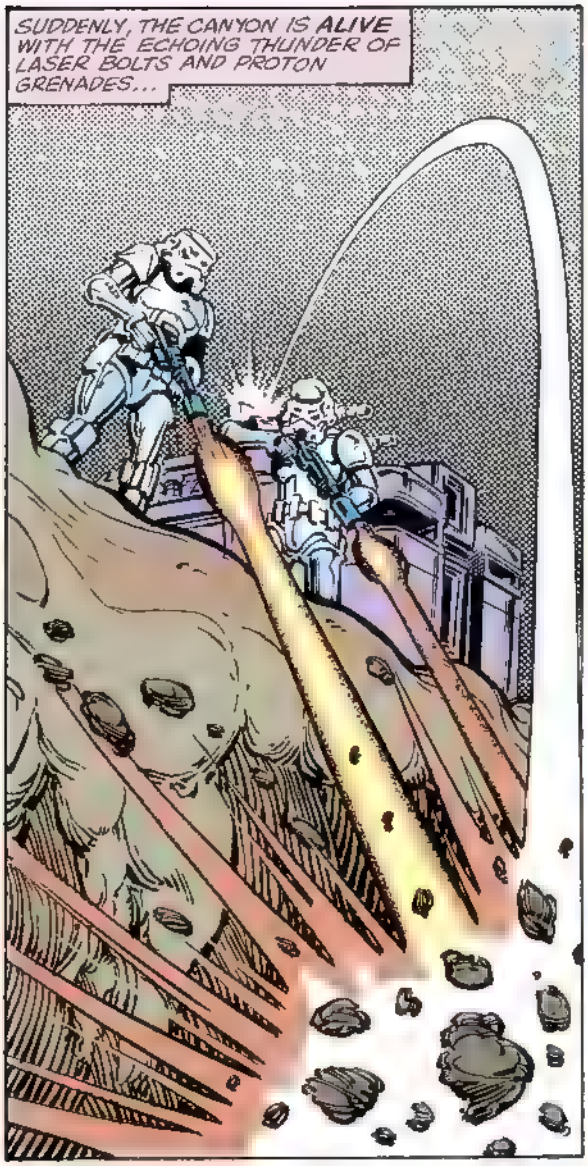
HELLO, CAMIE...I HAVEN'T HEARD THAT NICKNAME FOR A LONG TIME
NOT SINCE THAT DAY I CAME RACING INTO ANCHORHEAD TO TELL EVERYONE ABOUT THE BIG SPACE BATTLE...*
AND IF THE LOVE OF MY LIFE HAD SEEN YOU IN ACTION A MINUTE AGO.. SHE'D NEVER HAVE DARED TO USE IT
*ANCIENT HISTORY FROM STAR WARS #1.-- A.G.


I DON'T KNOW WHAT LUKE BOY'S BEEN DOING ALL THIS TIME, BUT HE'S SURE CHANGED.
YES I CAN SEE THAT NOW. HE LOOKS, TALLER SOMEHOW

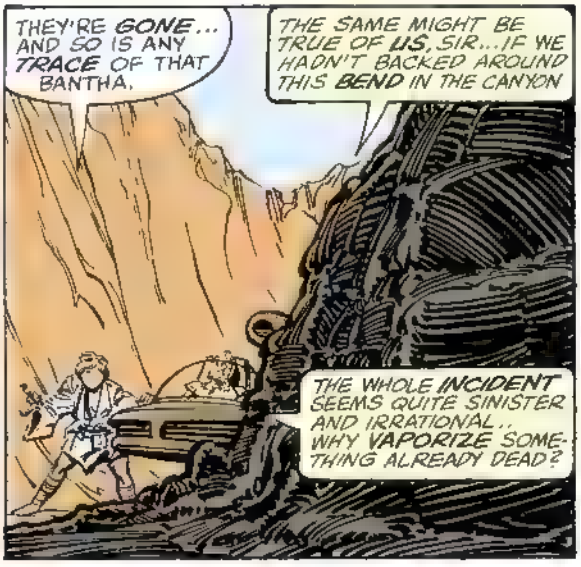

WE'VE CHANGED TOO, RIGHT, CAMIE...? MARRIED. THE TAGGE OUTFIT'S SET US UP IN THE OLD DARKLIGHTER PLACE.
THEIR PEOPLE ARE CONCENTRATING ON EXPANSION WORK OUT IN THE DUNE SEA AND JUNDLAND WASTES--
--SO THEY TOOK ME ON AS A SORT OF CARE-TAKER OF THEIR OTHER PROPERTIES. DOESN'T SOUND TOO EXCITING.
BUT YOU DON'T GET MANY BIG OPPORTUNITIES ON A PLACE LIKE TATOOINE.
AND ANY KIND OF TROUBLE COULD RUIN IT.
LIKE ME TRYING TO RECLAIM MY UNCLE'S PLACE, CAMIE? I'VE BEEN OFF WORLD TOO LONG TO GO BACK TO MOISTURE FARMING. MY ONLY BUSINESS IS IN MOS EISLEY.
I JUST DON'T LIKE THE TAGGE FAMILY GETTING IT. WITH THEIR CONNECTIONS, IT'S PRACTICALLY LIKE GIVING IT TO THE EMPIRE!
FIXER AND I DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME FOR POLITICS.. WE'RE KEPT BUSY JUST TRYING TO MAKE OUR LIVES A LITTLE BIT BETTER!
I UNDERSTAND, CAMIE, IT'S ONLY THAT--
MASTER LUKE--!
'ARTOO'S SENSORS HAVE PICKED UP A VEHICLE IN THE AREA, SIR LARGER THAN A LAND SPEEDER... SMALLER THAN A JAWA SAND-CRAWLER.
"THAT SOUNDS DISTRESSINGLY LIKE AN IMPERIAL TROOP CARRIER TO ME, SIR!"
THIS IS TAGGE COMMAND, UNIT THREE. ANY SUCCESS YET?
NEGATIVE COMMAND. WE ARE STILL SEARCHING

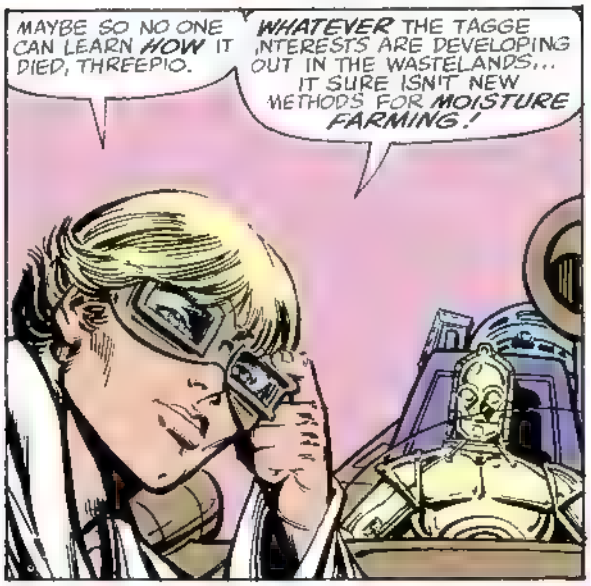

I'M SORRY TO HAVE RUSHED YOU AWAY FROM YOUR OLD FRIENDS, SIR. IT SEEMED BEST UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES
IT'S OKAY THREEPIO. WE DON'T SEEM TO HAVE MUCH IN COMMON NOW ANYWAY
FUNNY. ONCE I WOULD'VE GIVEN ANYTHING TO BE IN FIXER'S PLACE...TO HAVE A GIRL LIKE CAMIE. BUT NOW I--
MASTER LUKE! LOOK OUT--!
HOLY--! HOLD TIGHT! IT'S GONNA BE CLOSE!
VAROOM!
EVERYONE ALL RIGHT...? WE STOPPED SHY OF THE CANYON WALL BY AT LEAST AN INCH!
THREEPIO. ? THREEPIO?!
W-WHAT. ? OH. EXCUSE ME, SIR I THINK I SHUT DOWN FOR A MOMENT.
IS THAT AWFUL BEAST STILL --
STANDING THERE LIKE A STATUE! I'VE NEVER HEARD OF A BANTHA BEHAVING LIKE THAT!
I'M GOING TO TAKE A LOOK, THREEPIO.

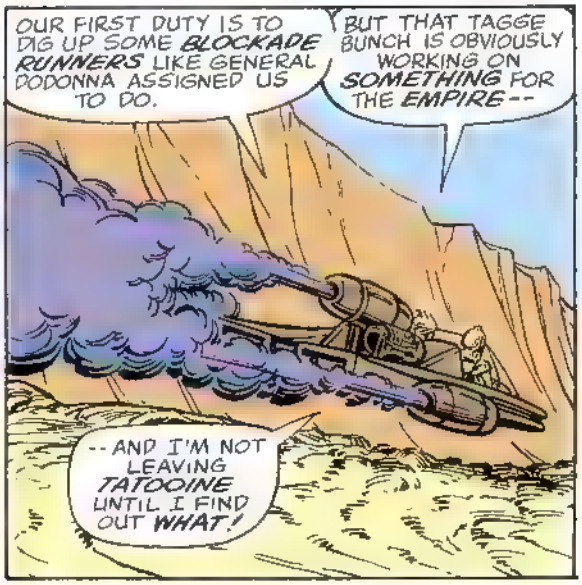

AND LUKE'S STEADY, CAUTIOUS MOVEMENT FORWARD ALSO PRODUCES NO REACTION...
THIS CAN'T BE...! I-IT'S DEAD--
BUT... IT FEELS COLD! FROZEN STIFF--
--RIGHT HERE UNDER TATOOINE'S TWIN SUNS!
BLOOP-BLEEP!
MASTER LUKE! ARTOO'S AUDIO RECEPTORS HAVE CAUGHT THE SOUND OF THAT TRANSPORT--
IT'S COMING THIS WAY WE'VE GOT TO RUN OR HIDE!
NO SOONER DO THE TRIO GET THE LANDSPEEDER TO COVER, THAN...
AT LAST, COMMANDER! STUPID CREATURE MUST HAVE WANDERED INTO THE CANYON BEFORE THE EFFECT TOOK!
THAT EXPLAINS WHY OUR SCANNER HAD TROUBLE PICKING IT UP!
NOW THAT WE'VE FOUND IT, YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO

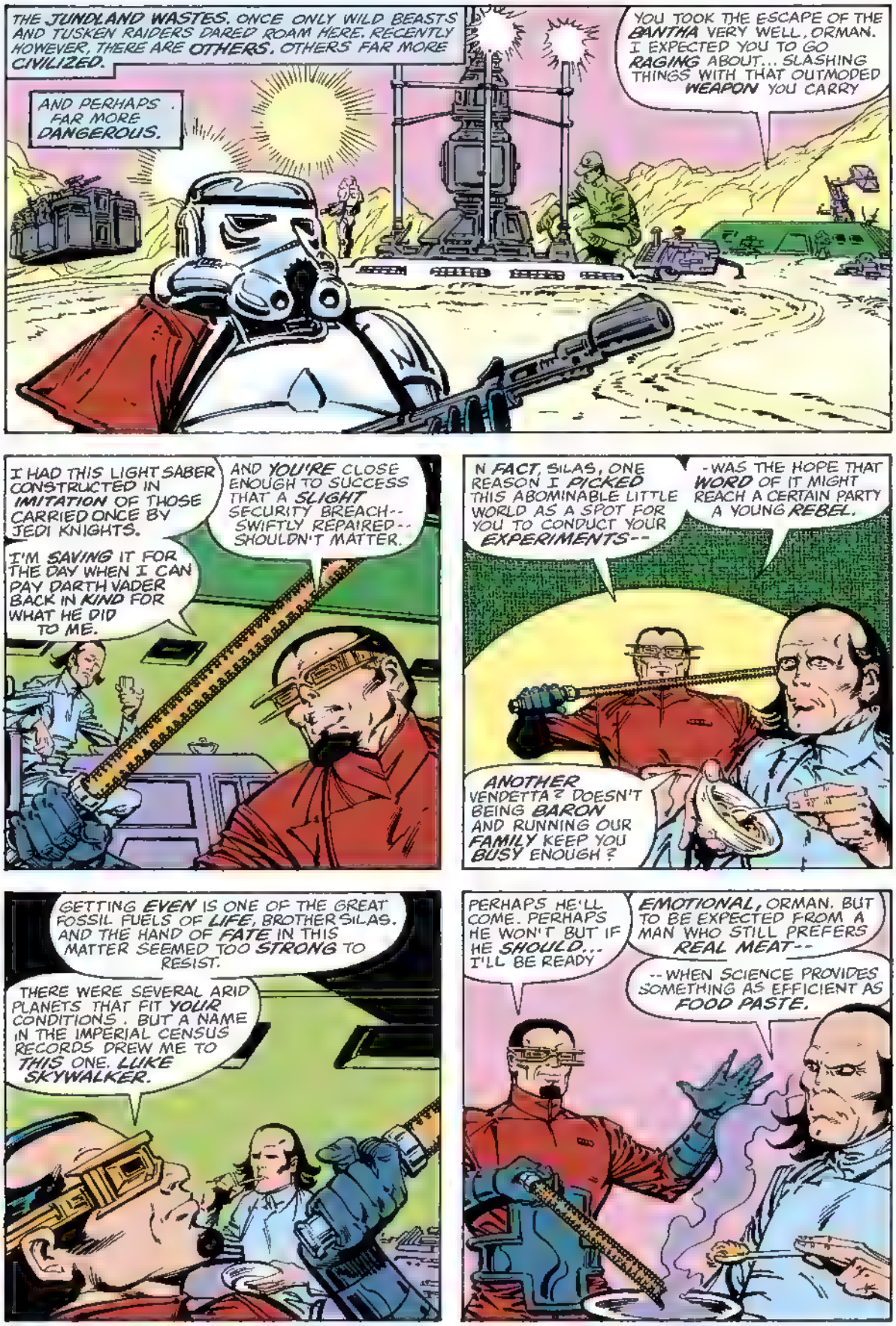

SUDDENLY, THE CANYON IS ALIVE WITH THE ECHOING THUNDER OF LASER BOLTS AND PROTON GRENADES...

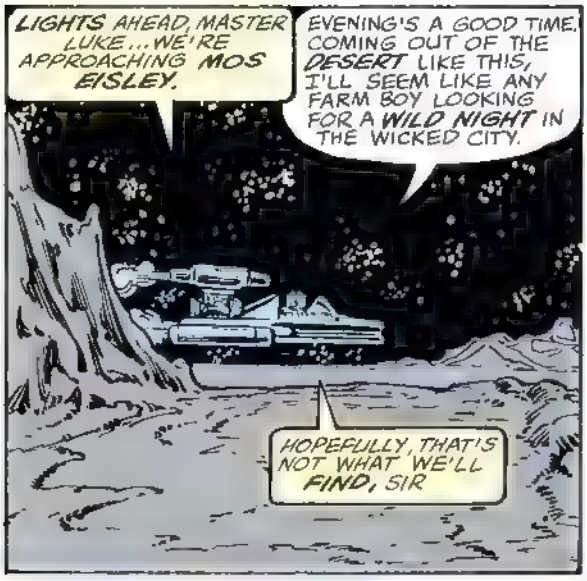
FOLLOWED BY...SILENCE.

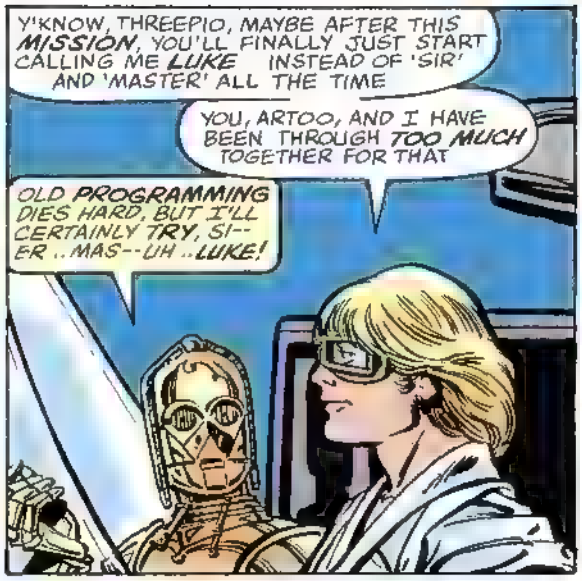

THEY'RE GONE... AND SO IS ANY TRACE OF THAT BANTHA.
THE SAME MIGHT BE TRUE OF US, SIR...IF WE HADN'T BACKED AROUND THIS BEND IN THE CANYON
THE WHOLE INCIDENT SEEMS QUITE SINISTER AND IRRATIONAL.. WHY VAPORIZE SOMETHING ALREADY DEAD?

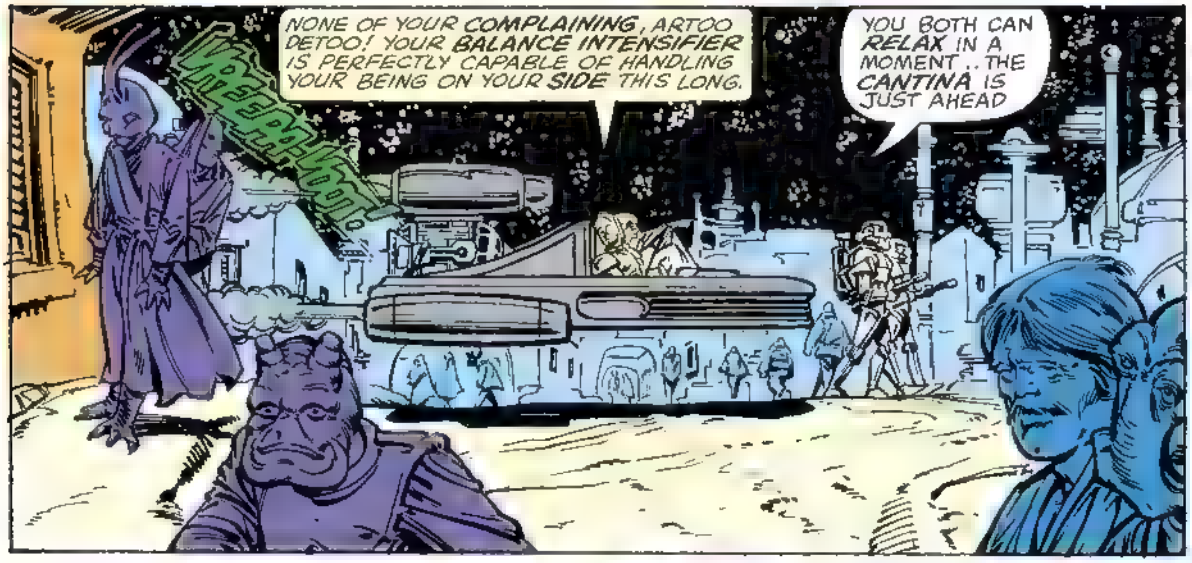

MAYBE SO NO ONE CAN LEARN HOW IT DIED, THREEPIO.
WHATEVER THE TAGGE INTERESTS ARE DEVELOPING OUT IN THE WASTELANDS... IT SURE ISN'T NEW METHODS FOR MOISTURE FARMING!

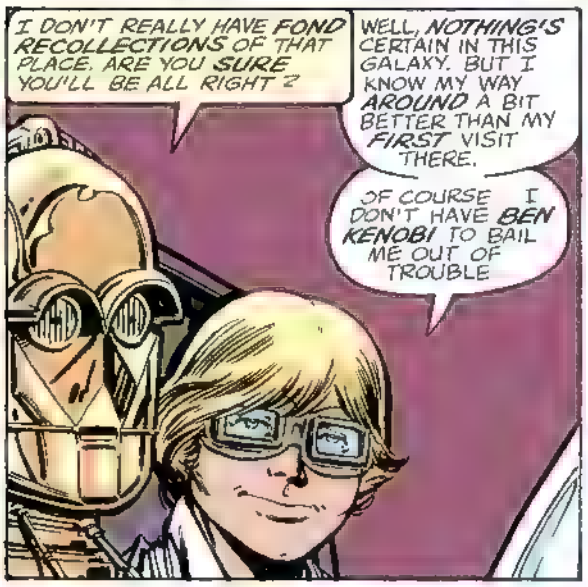

OUR FIRST DUTY IS TO DIG UP SOME BLOCKADE RUNNERS LIKE GENERAL DODONNA ASSIGNED US TO DO.
BUT THAT TAGGE BUNCH IS OBVIOUSLY WORKING ON SOMETHING FOR THE EMPIRE--
--AND I'M NOT LEAVING TATOOINE UNTIL I FIND OUT WHAT!


THE JUNDLAND WASTES. ONCE ONLY WILD BEASTS AND TUSKEN RAIDERS DARED ROAM HERE. RECENTLY HOWEVER, THERE ARE OTHERS. OTHERS FAR MORE CIVILIZED.
AND PERHAPS . FAR MORE DANGEROUS.
YOU TOOK THE ESCAPE OF THE BANTHA VERY WELL, ORMAN. I EXPECTED YOU TO GO RAGING ABOUT... SLASHING THINGS WITH THAT OUTMODED WEAPON YOU CARRY
I HAD THIS LIGHT SABER CONSTRUCTED IN IMITATION OF THOSE CARRIED ONCE BY JEDI KNIGHTS.
I'M SAVING IT FOR THE DAY WHEN I CAN PAY DARTH VADER BACK IN KIND FOR WHAT HE DID TO ME.
AND YOU'RE CLOSE ENOUGH TO SUCCESS THAT A SLIGHT SECURITY BREACH-- SWIFTLY REPAIRED-- SHOULDN'T MATTER.
IN FACT, SILAS, ONE REASON I PICKED THIS ABOMINABLE LITTLE WORLD AS A SPOT FOR YOU TO CONDUCT YOUR EXPERIMENTS--
-WAS THE HOPE THAT WORD OF IT MIGHT REACH A CERTAIN PARTY A YOUNG REBEL.
ANOTHER VENDETTA? DOESN'T BEING BARON AND RUNNING OUR FAMILY KEEP YOU BUSY ENOUGH?
GETTING EVEN IS ONE OF THE GREAT FOSSIL FUELS OF LIFE, BROTHER SILAS. AND THE HAND OF FATE IN THIS MATTER SEEMED TOO STRONG TO RESIST.
THERE WERE SEVERAL ARID PLANETS THAT FIT YOUR CONDITIONS. BUT A NAME IN THE IMPERIAL CENSUS RECORDS DREW ME TO THIS ONE. LUKE SKYWALKER.
PERHAPS HE'LL COME. PERHAPS HE WON'T BUT IF HE SHOULD... I'LL BE READY
EMOTIONAL, ORMAN. BUT TO BE EXPECTED FROM A MAN WHO STILL PREFERS REAL MEAT--
--WHEN SCIENCE PROVIDES SOMETHING AS EFFICIENT AS FOOD PASTE.


LIGHTS AHEAD, MASTER LUKE ... WE'RE APPROACHING MOS EISLEY.
EVENING'S A GOOD TIME. COMING OUT OF THE DESERT LIKE THIS, I'LL SEEM LIKE ANY FARM BOY LOOKING FOR A WILD NIGHT IN THE WICKED CITY.
HOPEFULLY, THAT'S NOT WHAT WE'LL FIND, SIR

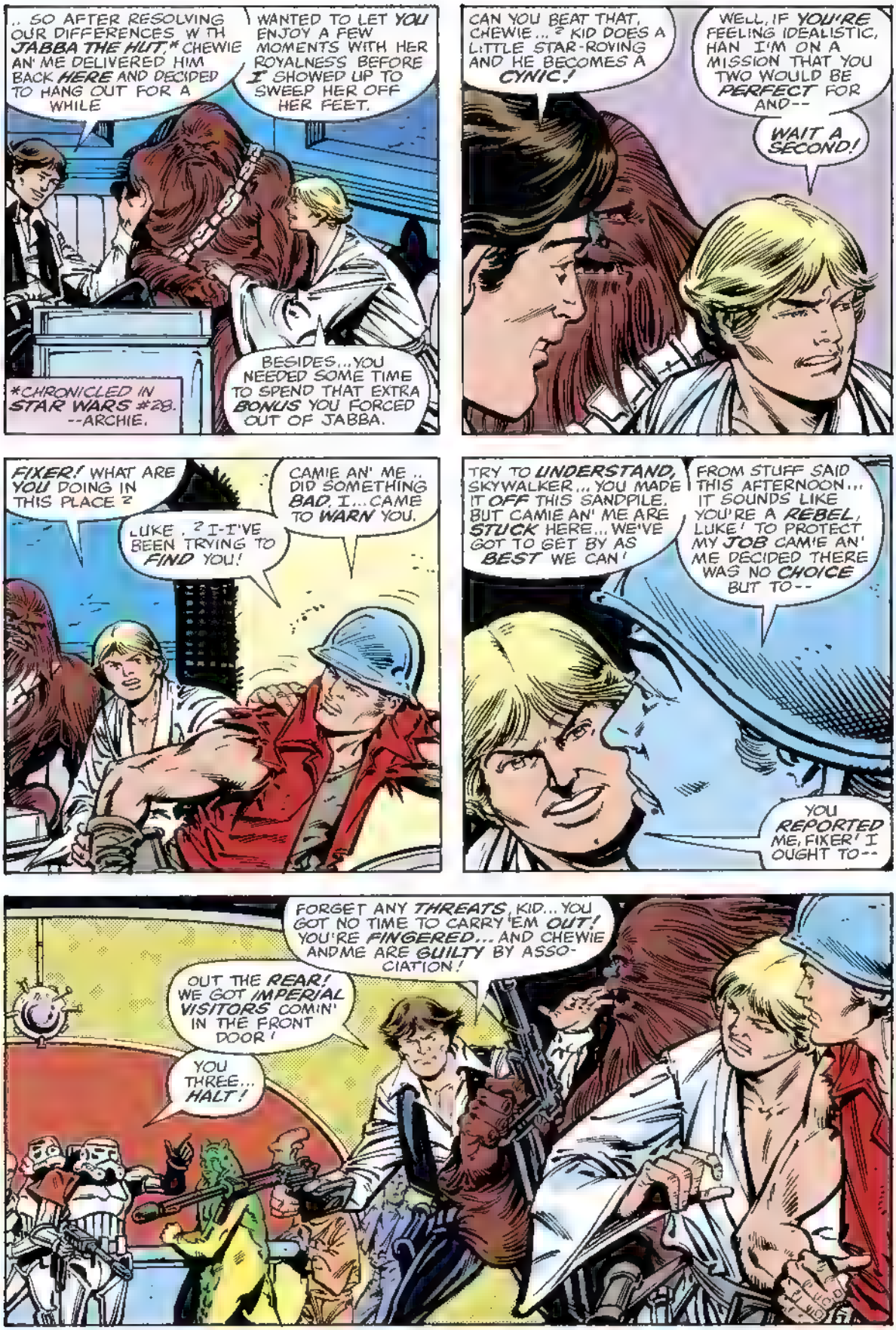

Y'KNOW, THREEPIO, MAYBE AFTER THIS MISSION, YOU'LL FINALLY JUST START CALLING ME LUKE INSTEAD OF 'SIR' AND 'MASTER' ALL THE TIME
YOU, ARTOO, AND I HAVE BEEN THROUGH TOO MUCH TOGETHER FOR THAT
OLD PROGRAMMING DIES HARD, BUT I'LL CERTAINLY TRY, SI-- ER .. MAS--UH .. LUKE!

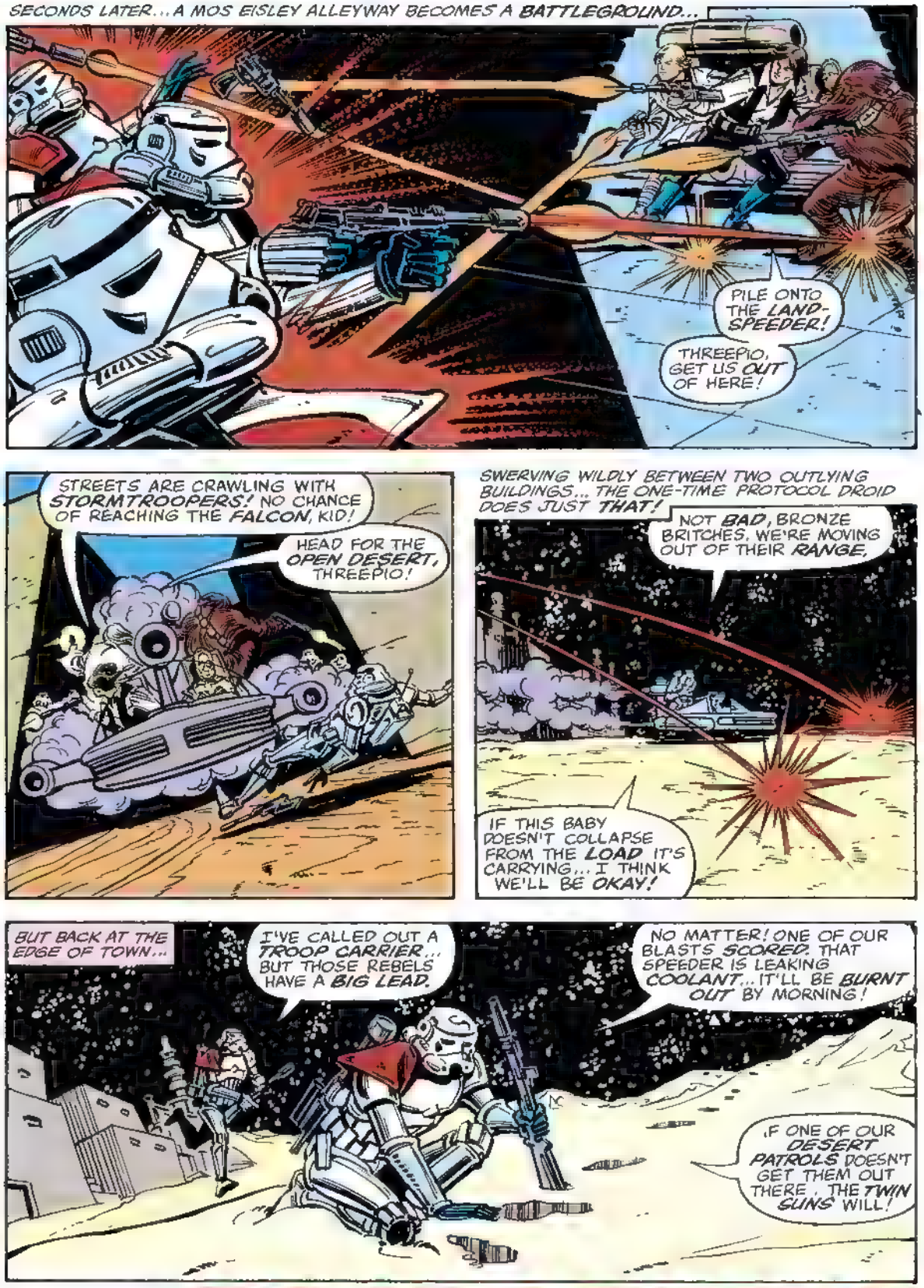

NONE OF YOUR COMPLAINING, ARTOO DETOO! YOUR BALANCE INTENSIFIER IS PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF HANDLING YOUR BEING ON YOUR SIDE THIS LONG.
YOU BOTH CAN RELAX IN A MOMENT .. THE CANTINA IS JUST AHEAD


I DON'T REALLY HAVE FOND RECOLLECTIONS OF THAT PLACE. ARE YOU SURE YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT?
WELL, NOTHING'S CERTAIN IN THIS GALAXY. BUT I KNOW MY WAY AROUND A BIT BETTER THAN MY FIRST VISIT THERE.
OF COURSE I DON'T HAVE BEN KENOBI TO BAIL ME OUT OF TROUBLE

PULL AROUND TO THE REAR ... AND KEEP THE SPEEDER READY TO MOVE, JUST IN CASE.

OH, BROTHER...! THE PLACE HASN'T CHANGED A BIT!
GENERAL DODONNA GAVE ME THIS ASSIGNMENT SO I'D HAVE SOMETHING TO DO INSTEAD OF WORRYING ABOUT THE PRINCESS--*
WRAK!
* LEIA HAS HER OWN MISSION. SEE LAST ISSUE.--ARCH AGAIN.
TRYING TO SELECT A FEW REASONABLY TRUSTWORTHY STAR HOPPERS FROM THIS MOTLEY COLLECTION OUGHT TO MORE THAN DO THE TRICK!
I'D GIVE ANYTHING JUST TO SEE A FRIENDLY FACE RIGHT NO--
:UNGHHH!:
HAN!
HEY, KID! HAVEN'T YOU LEARNED TO STAY OUT OF LOW CLASS DIVES... YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU'LL BUMP INTO!
WRAP UP THE FIGHT, CHEWIE! WE'VE GOT SOME SERIOUS CELEBRATING TO DO!
THOK!


.. SO AFTER RESOLVING OUR DIFFERENCES W TH JABBA THE HUT,* CHEWIE AN' ME DELIVERED HIM BACK HERE AND DECIDED TO HANG OUT FOR A WHILE
WANTED TO LET YOU ENJOY A FEW MOMENTS WITH HER ROYALNESS BEFORE I SHOWED UP TO SWEEP HER OFF HER FEET.
BESIDES... YOU NEEDED SOME TIME TO SPEND THAT EXTRA BONUS YOU FORCED OUT OF JABBA.
*CHRONICLED IN STAR WARS #28. --ARCHIE.
CAN YOU BEAT THAT, CHEWIE... ? KID DOES A LITTLE STAR-ROVING AND HE BECOMES A CYNIC!
WELL, IF YOU'RE FEELING IDEALISTIC, HAN I'M ON A MISSION THAT YOU TWO WOULD BE PERFECT FOR AND--
WAIT A SECOND!
FIXER! WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THIS PLACE ?
LUKE, ? I-I'VE BEEN TRYING TO FIND YOU!
CAMIE AN' ME .. DID SOMETHING BAD, I... CAME TO WARN YOU.
TRY TO UNDERSTAND, SKYWALKER... YOU MADE IT OFF THIS SANDPILE. BUT CAMIE AN' ME ARE STUCK HERE... WE'VE GOT TO GET BY AS BEST WE CAN!
FROM STUFF SAID THIS AFTERNOON... IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE A REBEL, LUKE! TO PROTECT MY JOB CAMIE AN' ME DECIDED THERE WAS NO CHOICE BUT TO--
YOU REPORTED ME, FIXER! I OUGHT TO--
FORGET ANY THREATS, KID... YOU GOT NO TIME TO CARRY 'EM OUT! YOU'RE FINGERED... AND CHEWIE AND ME ARE GUILTY BY ASSOCIATION!
OUT THE REAR! WE GOT IMPERIAL VISITORS COMIN' IN THE FRONT DOOR!
YOU THREE... HALT!


SECONDS LATER... A MOS EISLEY ALLEYWAY BECOMES A BATTLEGROUND...
PILE ONTO THE LAND-SPEEDER!
THREEPIO, GET US OUT OF HERE!
STREETS ARE CRAWLING WITH STORMTROOPERS! NO CHANCE OF REACHING THE FALCON, KID!
HEAD FOR THE OPEN DESERT, THREEPIO!
SWERVING WILDLY BETWEEN TWO OUTLYING BUILDINGS... THE ONE-TIME PROTOCOL DROID DOES JUST THAT!
NOT BAD, BRONZE BRITCHES. WE'RE MOVING OUT OF THEIR RANGE.
IF THIS BABY DOESN'T COLLAPSE FROM THE LOAD IT'S CARRYING... I THINK WE'LL BE OKAY!
BUT BACK AT THE EDGE OF TOWN...
I'VE CALLED OUT A TROOP CARRIER... BUT THOSE REBELS HAVE A BIG LEAD.
NO MATTER! ONE OF OUR BLASTS SCORED. THAT SPEEDER IS LEAKING COOLANT... IT'LL BE BURNT OUT BY MORNING!
IF ONE OF OUR DESERT PATROLS DOESN'T GET THEM OUT THERE, THE TWIN SUNS WILL!
NEXT ISSUE:
THE JAWA EXPRESS!

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IT'S ROLLING! AND NOT EVEN THE EMPIRE CAN STOP IT!
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ARCHIE GOODWIN WRITER/EDITOR · CARMINE INFANTINO & BOB WIACEK ARTISTS · JOHN COSTANZA LETTERER · PETRA GOLDBERG COLORIST · JIM SHOOTER CONSULTING EDITOR

THE JAWA Express

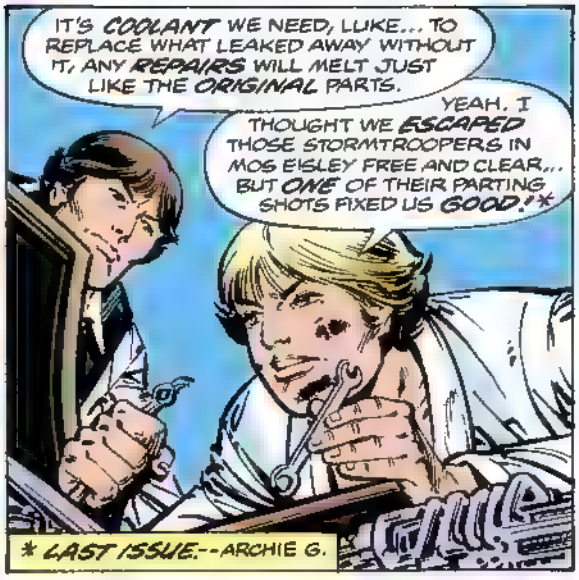
DAWN ON THE DUNE SEA! A LOT HAS **HAPPENED** TO LUKE SKYWALKER SINCE HE RETURNED TO HIS HOMEWORLD OF TATOOINE... THIS PARTICULAR MOMENT IS ONE OF THE **WORST.**

KID, WHAT WE GOT HERE IS A *SICK* LANDSPEEDER!

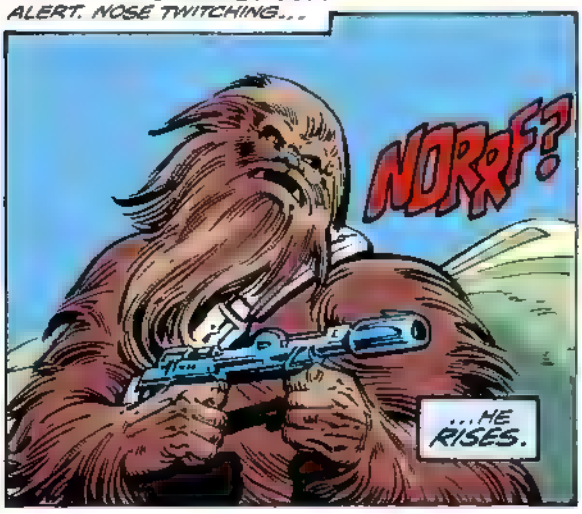
AND THIS IS NO PLACE TO BE WITHOUT *TRANSPORTATION* ONCE THOSE TWIN SUNS REALLY START *COOKIN'*!

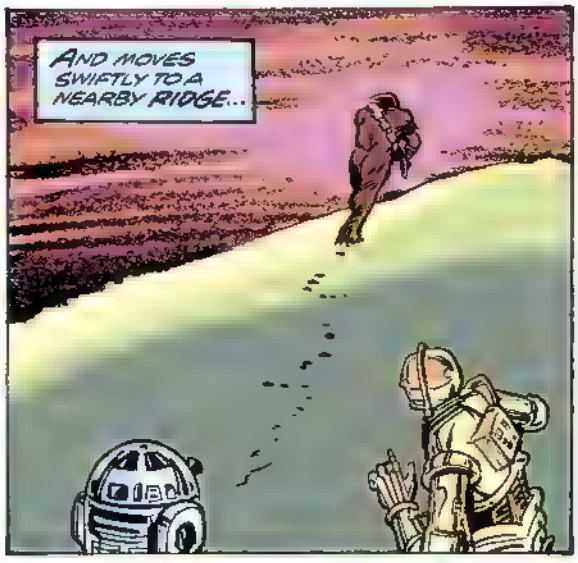
LF649

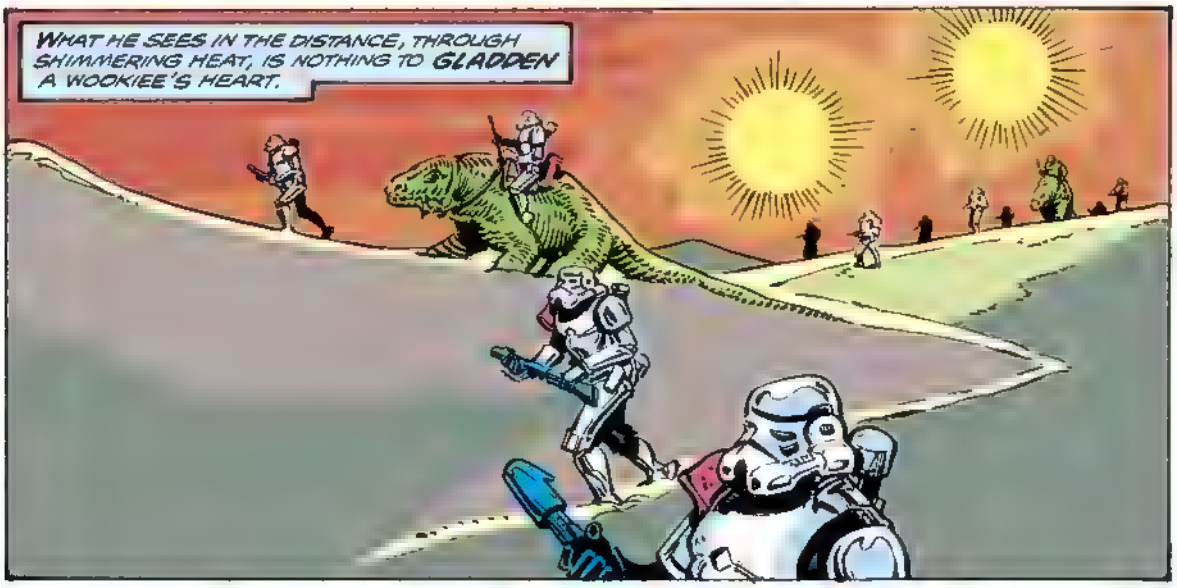
YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL AN EX-MOISTURE FARMER WHAT THE MIDDAY HEAT HERE CAN DO, HAN.
BUT WITH A LITTLE MORE WORK, I THINK WE CAN BYPASS THESE FUSED PARTS.

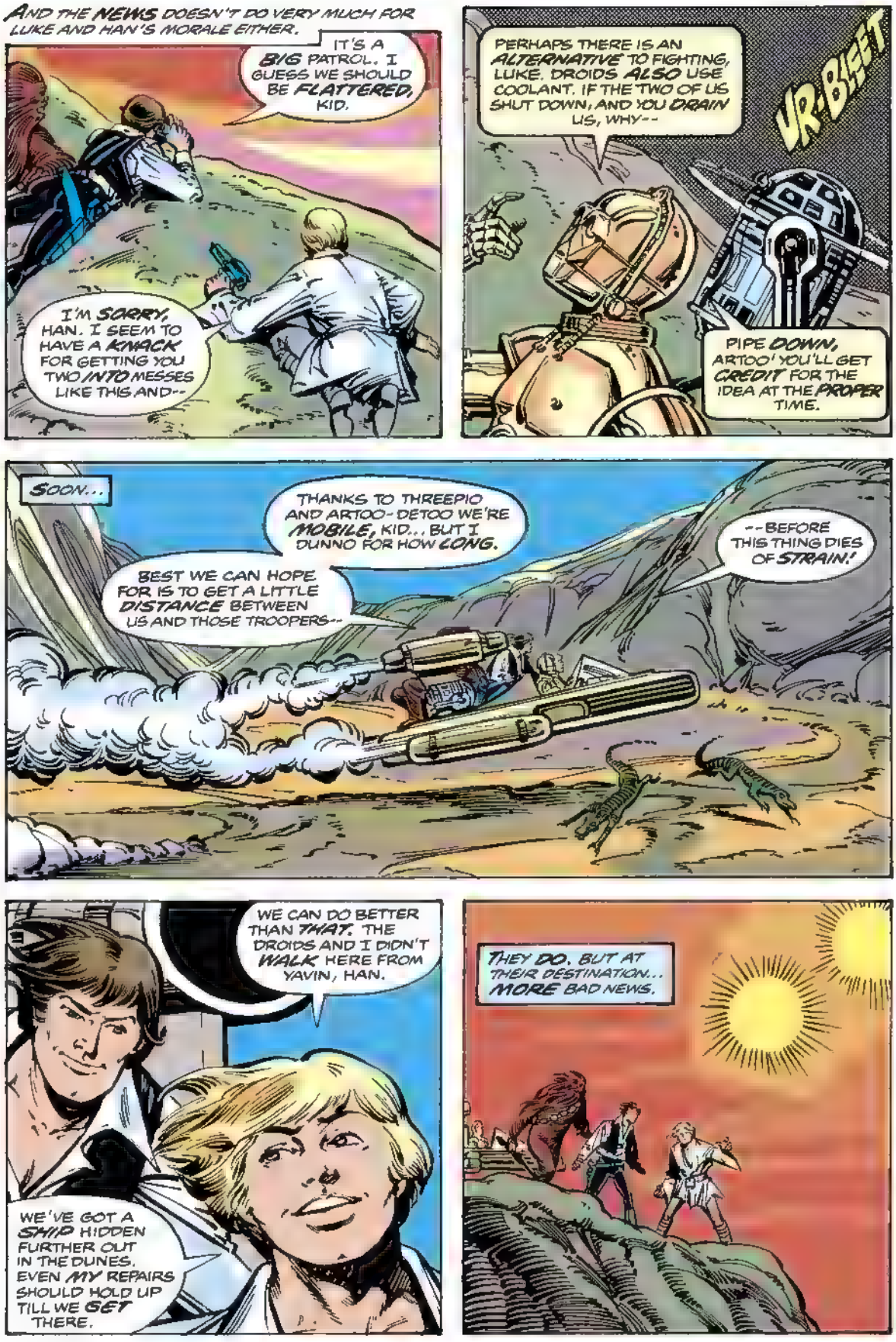

IT'S COOLANT WE NEED, LUKE... TO REPLACE WHAT LEAKED AWAY WITHOUT IT, ANY REPAIRS WILL MELT JUST LIKE THE ORIGINAL PARTS.
YEAH. I THOUGHT WE ESCAPED THOSE STORMTROOPERS IN MOS EISLEY FREE AND CLEAR... BUT ONE OF THEIR PARTING SHOTS FIXED US GOOD!*
* LAST ISSUE.--ARCHIE G.

AS LUKE AND HAN SOLO GRIMLY DISCUSS THEIR SITUATION... CHEWBACCA SUDDENLY COMES ALERT. NOSE TWITCHING...





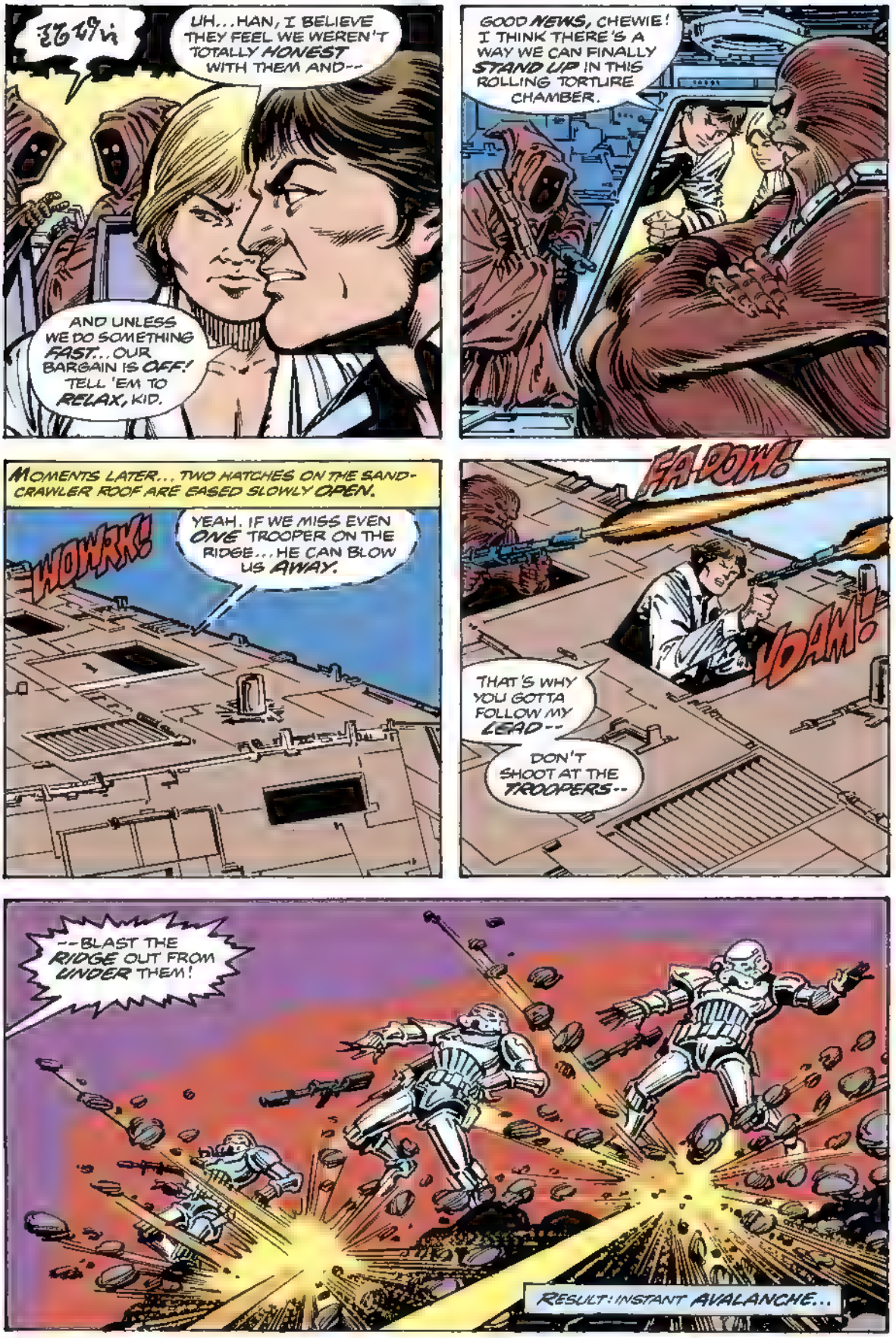



AND THE NEWS DOESN'T DO VERY MUCH FOR LUKE AND HAN'S MORALE EITHER.
IT'S A BIG PATROL. I GUESS WE SHOULD BE FLATTERED, KID.
I'M SORRY, HAN. I SEEM TO HAVE A KNACK FOR GETTING YOU TWO INTO MESSES LIKE THIS AND--
PERHAPS THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE TO FIGHTING, LUKE. DROIDS ALSO USE COOLANT. IF THE TWO OF US SHUT DOWN, AND YOU DRAIN US, WHY--
UR-BLEET
PIPE DOWN, ARTOO! YOU'LL GET CREDIT FOR THE IDEA AT THE PROPER TIME.
SOON...
THANKS TO THREEPIO AND ARTOO-DETOO WE'RE MOBILE, KID... BUT I DUNNO FOR HOW LONG.
BEST WE CAN HOPE FOR IS TO GET A LITTLE DISTANCE BETWEEN US AND THOSE TROOPERS--
--BEFORE THIS THING DIES OF STRAIN!
WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT. THE DROIDS AND I DIDN'T WALK HERE FROM YAVIN, HAN.
WE'VE GOT A SHIP HIDDEN FURTHER OUT IN THE DUNES. EVEN MY REPAIRS SHOULD HOLD UP TILL WE GET THERE.
THEY DO. BUT AT THEIR DESTINATION... MORE BAD NEWS.

JAWAS!
IT FIGURES, LUKE! SCANNER-PROOF CAMOUFLAGE MIGHT FOOL THE IMPERIALS--
BUT THOSE GREEDY LITTLE BEGGERS CAN SNIFF OUT ABANDONED MACHINERY ANYWHERE!
BARRWK!
WELL, THEY'RE NOT GOING TO SCAVENGE MY SHIP... I'VE GOT A MISSION TO FINISH!
HEY! KNOCK IT OFF.. RIGHT NOW!
ZWLOO!!

EASY, KID! WE'VE ALREADY GOT ENEMIES... RIGHT NOW WE COULD USE SOME FRIENDS. YOUR SHIP'S TOO FAR GONE TO HELP US NOW.
BUT, HAN--
FACE IT, LUKE... FINDERS KEEPERS IS ALL THESE GUYS KNOW. WITH THE LANDSPEEDER WHEEZIN' ITS LAST... IT'S TIME TO BE CHARMING.
SMILE! WE NEED A LIFT IN THEIR SANDCRAWLER...
AND THAT INVOLVES CHALLENGING THE JAWAS AT WHAT THEY DO BEST... HAGGLING.
THEY'RE NOT GOING FOR JUST THE 'SPEEDER, HAN... THEY WANT THE DROIDS TOO!
PROMISE 'EM ANYTHING, KID... LONG AS THEY AGREE TO GET US BACK TO MOS EISLEY.
THREEPIO AND ARTOO AREN'T JUST ROBOTS TO ME... THEY'RE FRIENDS! I'D FEEL LIKE A SLAVER!
CHEWIE AN' I STASHED PART OF OUR BONUS FROM JABBA THE HUT* ABOARD THE MILLENNIUM FALCON... WE CAN USE IT TO BUY BACK THE DROIDS!
MAKE A FAST DEAL AND GET US OUT OF HERE!
*SEE SW #28.--AG.
BUT THERE CAN BE DANGER IN FAST DEALS...
MOVIN' AT LAST, KID! NOT EXACTLY WARP SPEED... BUT MOVIN'.
BY THE TIME WE HIT MOS EISLEY, THE HEAT SHOULD BE OFF AND--
ONE PROBLEM, HAN... THIS ISN'T THE WAY TO MOS EISLEY.

HEY! WHAT IS THIS, GUYS? WE HAVE A BARGAIN!
OW!
HAN, IF I UNDERSTAND RIGHT... THEY'RE KEEPING THE BARGAIN. BUT THEY'RE GOING TO FINISH THEIR SCAVENGER RUN FIRST!
NICE! HOW MANY DAYS OUT OF OUR WAY IS THAT?
NOT DAYS, HAN... MONTHS. THREE OF 'EM!
THREE MONTHS?! WE'LL DIE OF CONCUSSIONS BANGIN' AROUND IN THESE JAWA-SIZED COMPARTMENTS! KID, YOU GOTTA--
VEEOOW!
HALT THAT VEHICLE! MY MEN ON THE RIDGE WILL STOP IT WITH PROTON GRENADES IF YOU FAIL TO OBEY!
SUSPECTED REBELS ARE IN THE AREA... WE'RE COMING ABOARD TO SEARCH!


UH... HAN, I BELIEVE THEY FEEL WE WEREN'T TOTALLY HONEST WITH THEM AND--
AND UNLESS WE DO SOMETHING FAST... OUR BARGAIN IS OFF! TELL 'EM TO RELAX, KID.
GOOD NEWS, CHEWIE! I THINK THERE'S A WAY WE CAN FINALLY STAND UP IN THIS ROLLING TORTURE CHAMBER.
MOMENTS LATER... TWO HATCHES ON THE SAND-CRAWLER ROOF ARE EASED SLOWLY OPEN.
WOWRK!
YEAH. IF WE MISS EVEN ONE TROOPER ON THE RIDGE... HE CAN BLOW US AWAY.
FA DOW!
VDAM!
THAT'S WHY YOU GOTTA FOLLOW MY LEAD--
DON'T SHOOT AT THE TROOPERS--
--BLAST THE RIDGE OUT FROM UNDER THEM!
RESULT: INSTANT AVALANCHE...

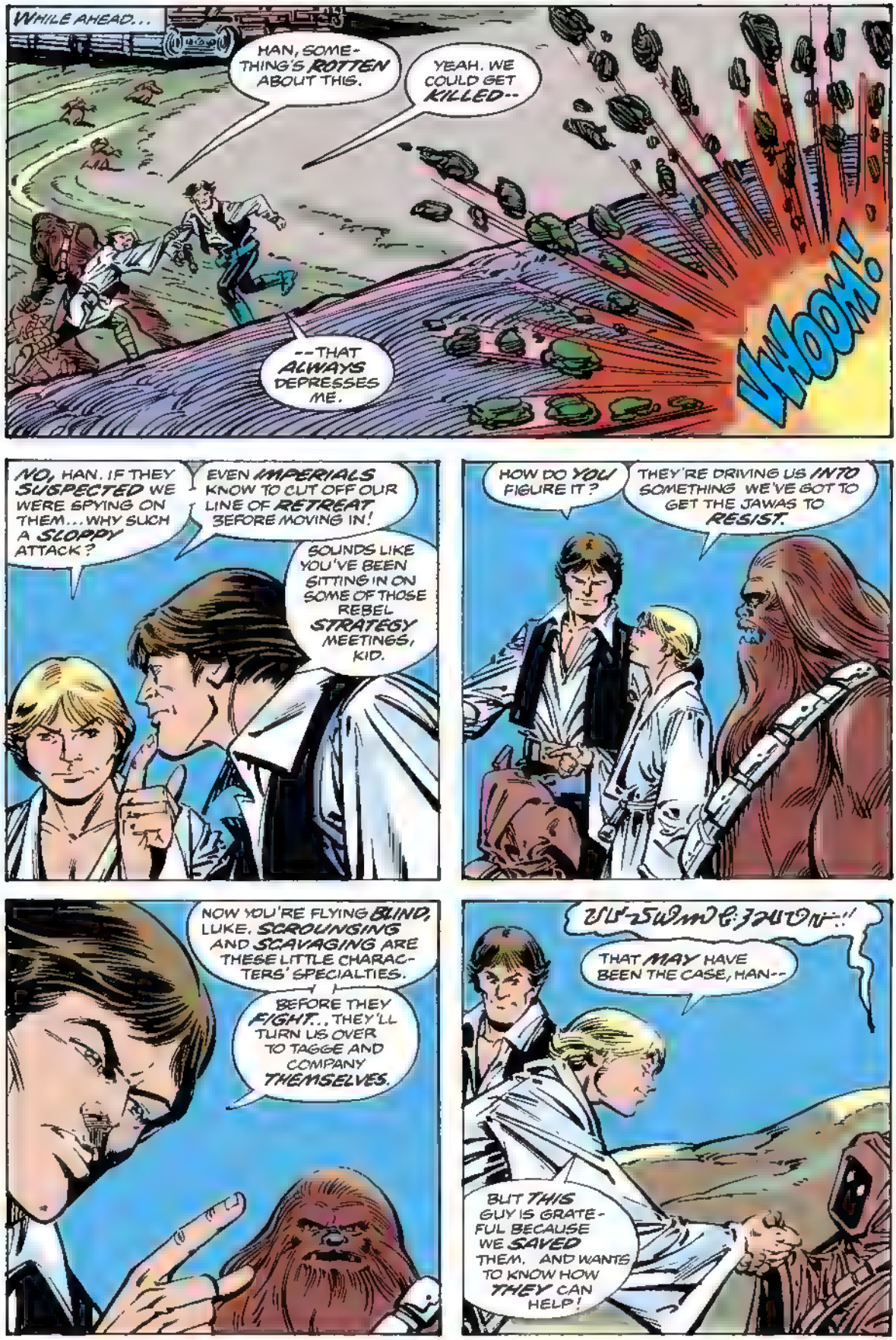
...THAT SWEEPS THE STORMTROOPERS ABOVE INTO THEIR COMPANIONS BELOW...
BA-WOM!
...CARRYING THEIR ARMED PROTON GRENADES WITH THEM!
BETTER HAVE OUR LITTLE PALS BACK UP, LUKE... THIS ISN'T MUCH OF A THOROUGHFARE ANYMORE.
THEY'RE DOING IT, HAN... BUT I GET THE FEELING THEY'RE NOT TOO HAPPY ABOUT IT.
APPARENTLY THEY'D HOPED TO AVOID THE JUNDLAND WASTES... NOW THEY CAN'T.
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? ARE THEY AFRAID OF SAND PEOPLE?
NO. SOMETHING ELSE... BUT I THINK I CAN GUESS WHAT, HAN.

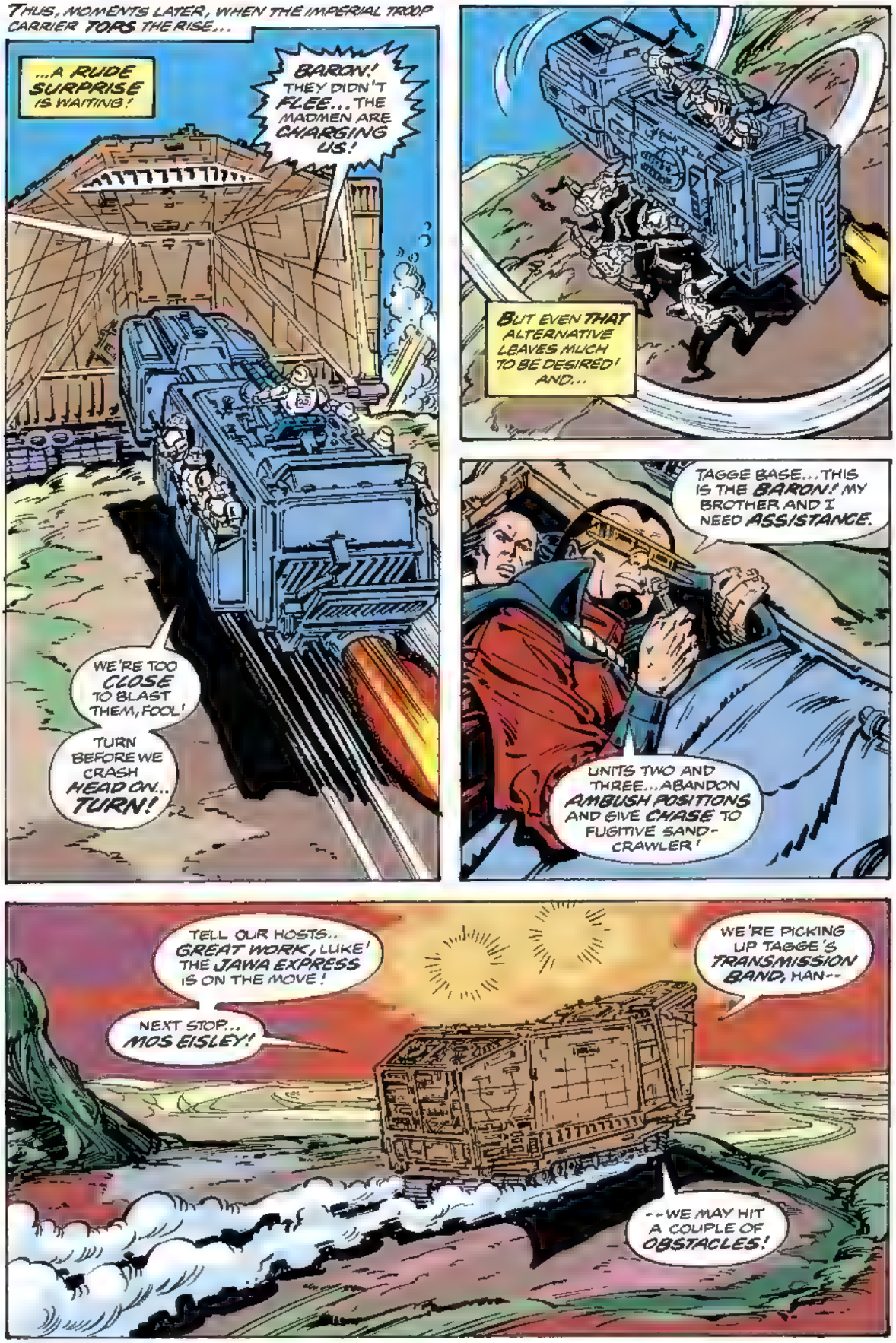
THE HOUSE OF TAGGE IS UP TO SOMETHING OUT HERE... AND THEY'RE DOING IT FOR THE EMPIRE.
THREEPIO, ARTOO, AND I SAW ENOUGH TO BE CERTAIN OF THAT YESTERDAY WHILE WE WERE MAKING OUR WAY INTO MOS EISLEY.*
*LAST ISSUE--ARCHIE.
MY MISSION FOR THE ALLIANCE IS TO RECRUIT PILOTS TO BECOME BLOCKADE RUNNERS FOR US, SO I COULDN'T TAKE TIME TO INVESTIGATE, BUT--
HEY! WE'RE STOPPING AGAIN!
THAT SEEMS TO BE WHAT THIS THING DOES BEST.
WHAT'S GOING ON, LUKE,.. ? EVERYONE ABANDONING SHIP OR WHAT IT..
:OW!:
THE ANSWER LIES OUTSIDE...
MACHINERY, HAN...! LOOKS LIKE A GIANT VAPORATOR!
NO WONDER OUR SHORT FRIENDS ARE EXCITED, KID... THERE'S ANOTHER SAND-CRAWLER. THEY'VE GOT COMPETITION FOR THE LOOT.
WAIT, HAN WHATEVER THIS IS...IT ISN'T A VAPORATOR. I'VE SEEN TOO MANY TO THINK THAT AND--

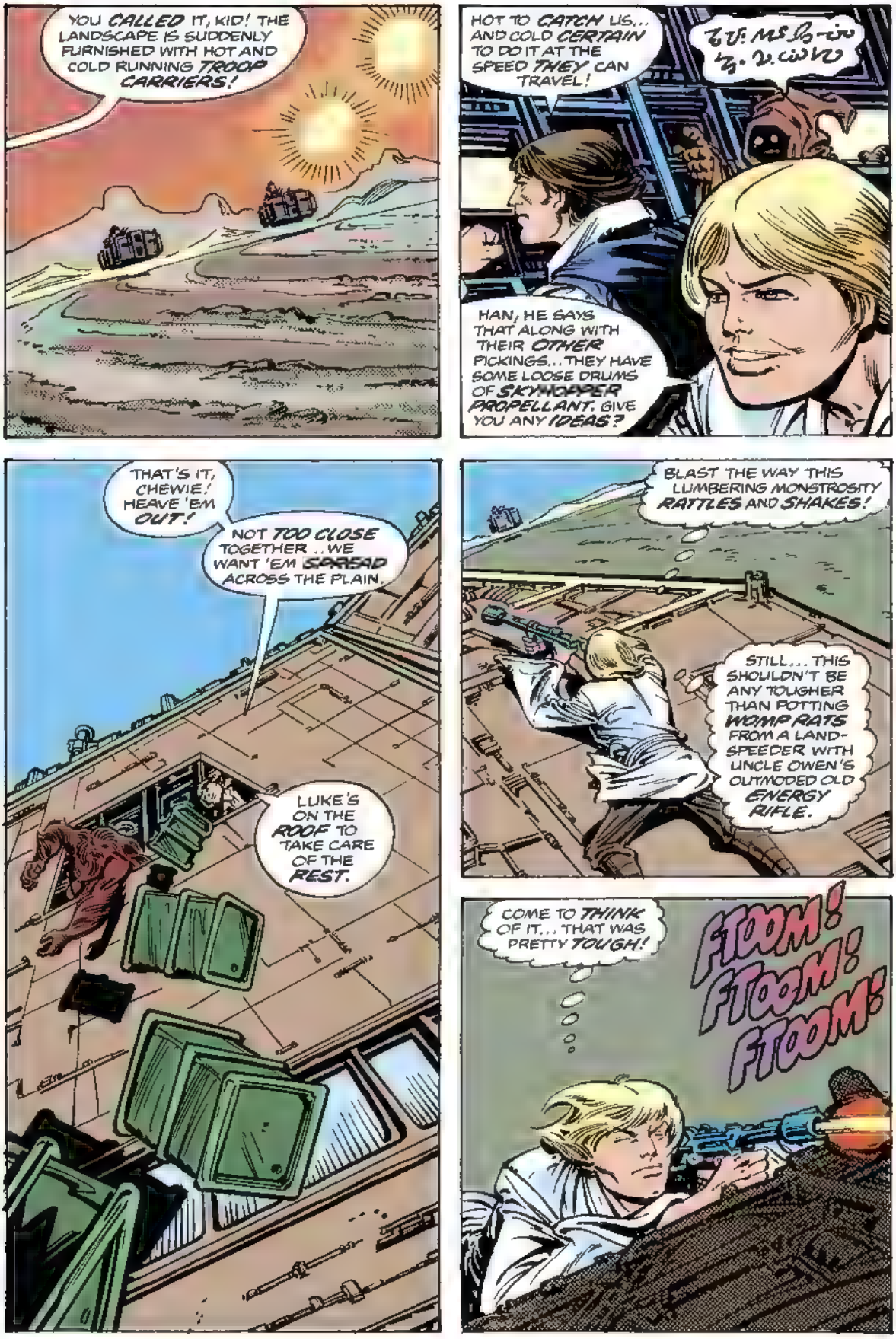
A CHILLING TINGLE GOES THROUGH LUKE...
HAN! CHEWBACCA!
WE'VE GOT TO GET THE JAWAS AND OURSELVES AWAY FROM THIS THING... FAST!
HUSTLE IT, HALF-PINTS! THE KID'S NOT GIVEN TO PRACTICAL JOKES.
AWRK!
?..Wwl?!
THEN, WITH THE SUDDENESS OF LIGHTNING STRIKING... SOMETHING SWEEPS THE DESERT PLAIN BEFORE THE TOWER. SOMETHING IMPOSSIBLE.
AND ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE, BELOW THE RISE..
LUKE ! THE WIND... THE SAND...
I KNOW, HAN... THEY FEEL COLD.
MOMENTS PASS... NOTHING HAPPENS. CAUTIOUSLY, THE GROUP MOVES FORWARD.
WRAAG!
YOU SAID IT, BIG BUDDY! BETWEEN HERE AN' THAT DISTANT TOWER .. THE WHOLE PLAIN'S FROZEN!
NOT JUST THE PLAIN... LOOK!

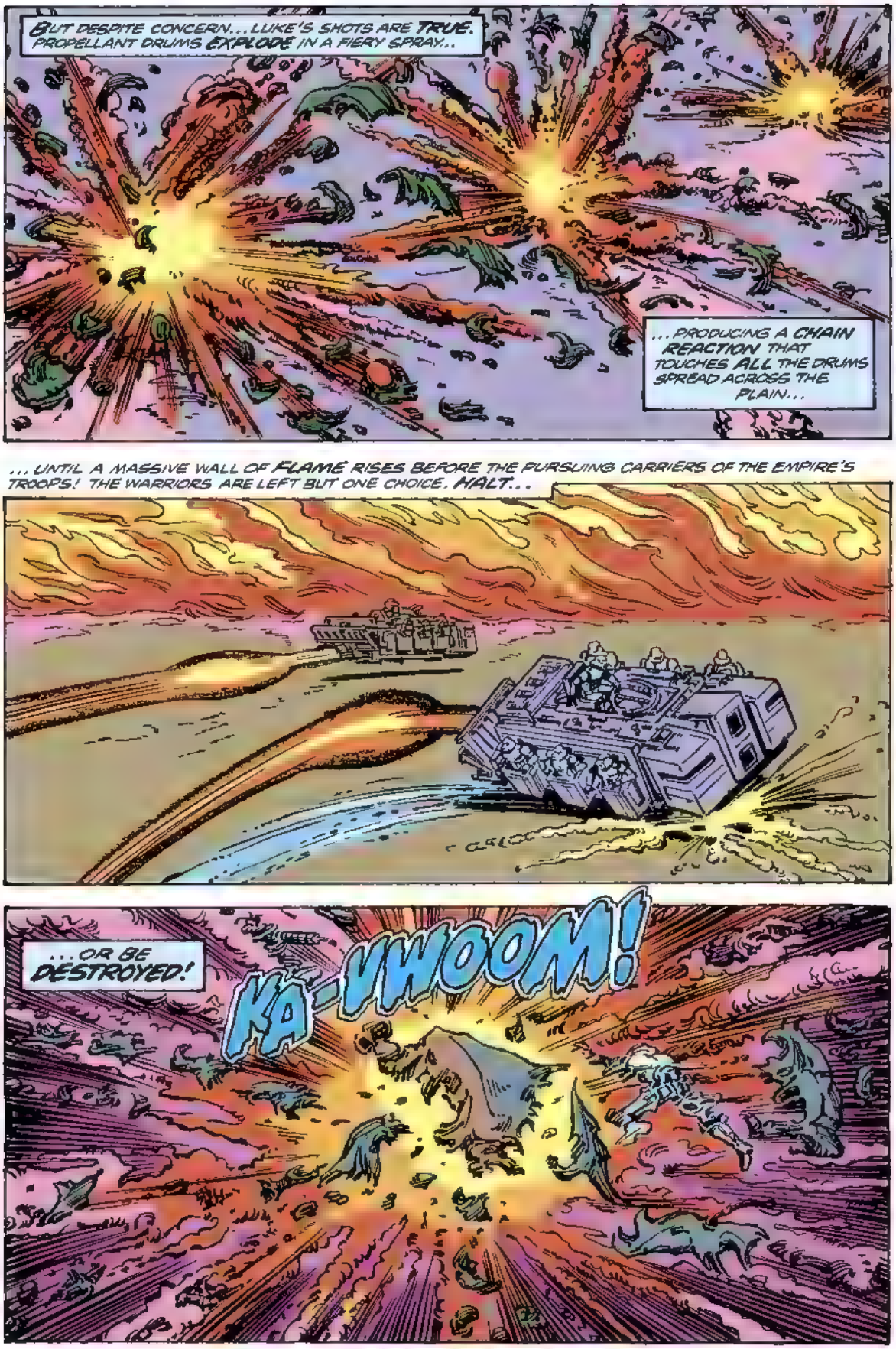
"THE OTHER SANDCRAWLER...! I-IT'S COLLAPSING...! THE COLD IS SO GREAT... EVEN THE METAL IS SHATTERING!"
SSHHRAAAAAAAAAAKKK!!!
THAT COULD'VE BEEN US, KID... IF YOU HADN'T YELLED. WAS THAT THE FORCE IN ACTION...?
NOT THIS TIME, HAN... I FELT THE TOWER STARTING TO GET COLD. IT REMINDED ME OF YESTERDAY--
-- AND A FROZEN BANTHA THE DROIDS AND I DISCOVERED!*
*ALSO LAST ISSUE:--ARCH
I THINK WE'VE FOUND--
DON'T BOTHER TRANSLATING, LUKE! THE TONE SOUNDS LIKE: EVERYBODY DOWN!
AND FOR GOOD REASON. THERE ARE NEW ARRIVALS ON THE SCENE...
EXCELLENT, SILAS... EXCELLENT! UNDER THE MERCILESS TWIN SUNS OF THIS HELLHOLE PLANET... YOU'VE ACHIEVED THIS!
IF YOU'LL EXAMINE THE BODIES OF THOSE LITTLE CREATURES WHO WERE IN THE MACHINE--
--YOU'LL FIND THEY WERE FROZEN AS WELL, ORMAN.

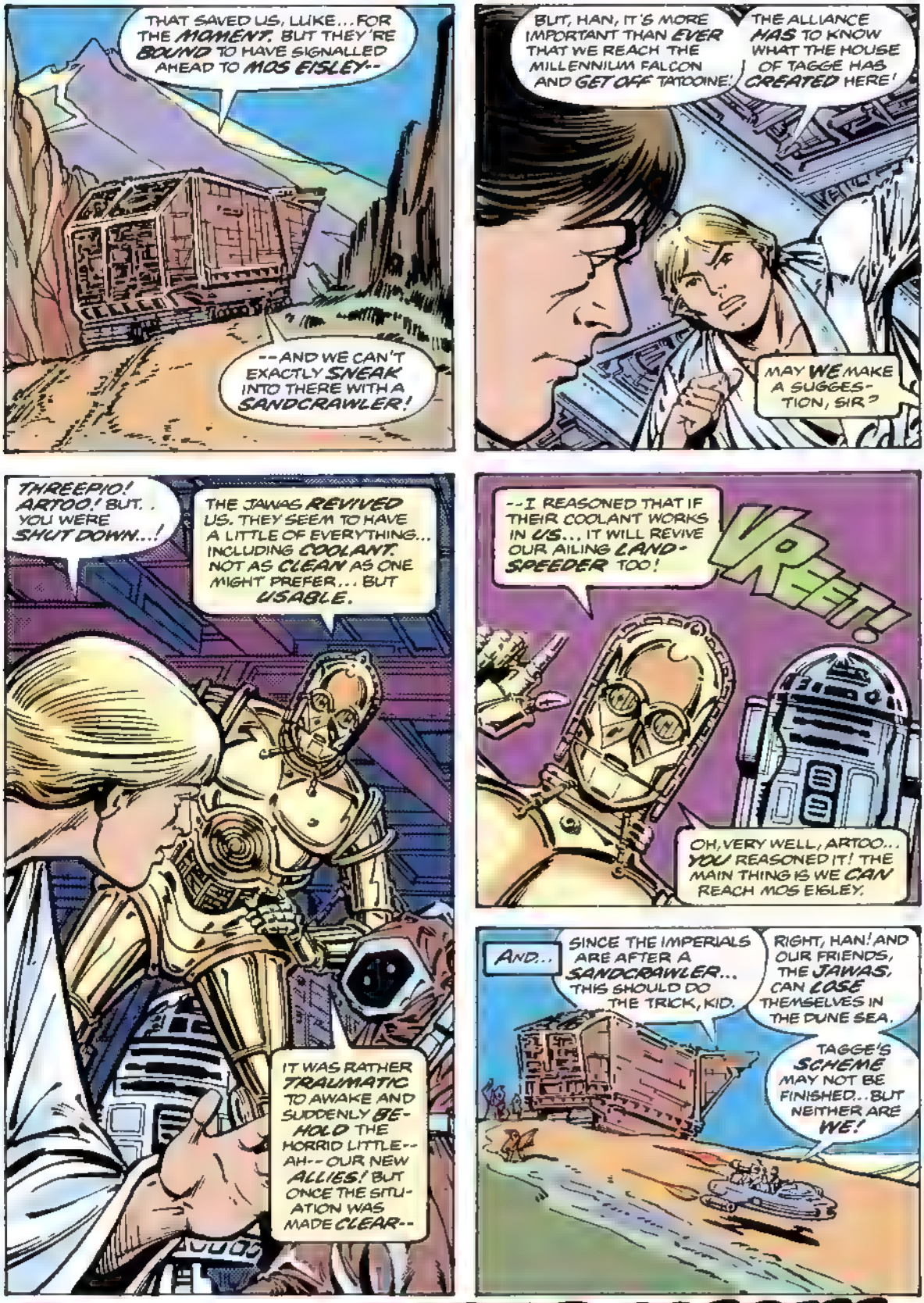
I BELIEVE IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT NOTHING CAUGHT BETWEEN THE CONDUCTOR TOWERS CAN SURVIVE--
--NOT WHEN WE GENERATE THE OMEGA FROST, MY DEAR BROTHER.
YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DUPLICATE THIS SUCCESS ANYWHERE... IN ANY ENVIRONMENT?
PERHAPS NOT IN THE HEART OF A NOVA. BUT IF IT WORKS UNDER THESE ARID CONDITIONS... I'M CONFIDENT I CAN ADJUST IT FOR WHATEVER YOU REQUIRE.
THE OMEGA FROST! BRILLIANT, SILAS ...! IT'S GOING TO BE THE CLUB WITH WHICH WE BEAT DARTH VADER FROM THE EMPEROR'S FAVOR.
BARON TAGGE? WHAT ABOUT THE REBELS, SIR? THEY'RE STILL OBSERVING US.
GOOD. THEY HAVEN'T GUESSED THAT THE CONDUCTOR TOWER HAS A SENSOR SYSTEM THAT DETECTED THEM AND ALERTED US.
IF UNITS TWO AND THREE ARE IN POSITION... LET'S BEGIN HERDING THEM WHERE WE WANT THEM.
AND WITH TAGGE ABOARD, THE IMPERIAL TROOP CARRIER SUDDENLY, SWIFTLY MOVES...
...OPENING FIRE WITH ITS LASER CANNON!
NOT TOO CLOSE TO THEIR POSITION--
--ONE OF THEM IS LUKE SKYWALKER.
I WANT HIM ALIVE... TO DEAL WITH PERSONALLY!

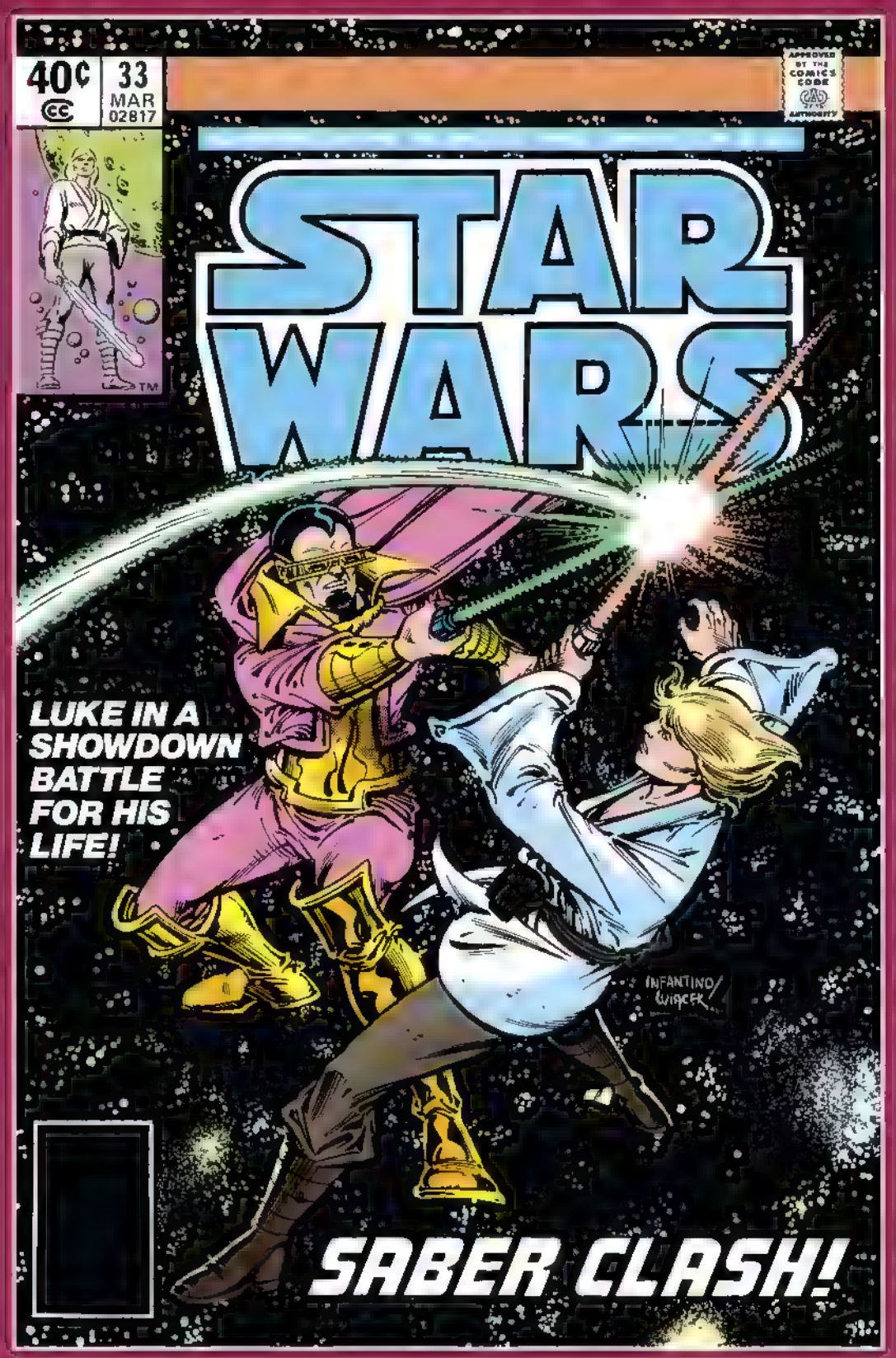

WHILE AHEAD...
HAN, SOMETHING'S ROTTEN ABOUT THIS.
YEAH. WE COULD GET KILLED--
--THAT ALWAYS DEPRESSES ME.
WOOM!
NO, HAN. IF THEY SUSPECTED WE WERE SPYING ON THEM...WHY SUCH A SLOPPY ATTACK?
EVEN IMPERIALS KNOW TO CUT OFF OUR LINE OF RETREAT BEFORE MOVING IN!
SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN SITTING IN ON SOME OF THOSE REBEL STRATEGY MEETINGS, KID.
HOW DO YOU FIGURE IT?
THEY'RE DRIVING US INTO SOMETHING WE'VE GOT TO GET THE JAWAS TO RESIST.
NOW YOU'RE FLYING BLIND, LUKE. SCROUNGING AND SCAVAGING ARE THESE LITTLE CHARACTERS' SPECIALTIES.
BEFORE THEY FIGHT... THEY'LL TURN US OVER TO TAGGE AND COMPANY THEMSELVES.
THAT MAY HAVE BEEN THE CASE, HAN--
BUT THIS GUY IS GRATEFUL BECAUSE WE SAVED THEM. AND WANTS TO KNOW HOW THEY CAN HELP!


THUS, MOMENTS LATER, WHEN THE IMPERIAL TROOP CARRIER TORS THE RISE...
...A RUDE SURPRISE IS WAITING!
BARON! THEY DIDN'T FLEE... THE MADMEN ARE CHARGING US!
WE'RE TOO CLOSE TO BLAST THEM, FOOL!
TURN BEFORE WE CRASH HEAD ON... TURN!
BUT EVEN THAT ALTERNATIVE LEAVES MUCH TO BE DESIRED! AND...
TAGGE BASE... THIS IS THE BARON! MY BROTHER AND I NEED ASSISTANCE.
UNITS TWO AND THREE... ABANDON AMBUSH POSITIONS AND GIVE CHASE TO FUGITIVE SAND-CRAWLER!
TELL OUR HOSTS... GREAT WORK, LUKE! THE JAWA EXPRESS IS ON THE MOVE!
NEXT STOP... MOS EISLEY!
WE'RE PICKING UP TAGGE'S TRANSMISSION BAND, HAN--
--WE MAY HIT A COUPLE OF OBSTACLES!


YOU CALLED IT, KID! THE LANDSCAPE IS SUDDENLY FURNISHED WITH HOT AND COLD RUNNING TROOP CARRIERS!
HOT TO CATCH US... AND COLD CERTAIN TO DO IT AT THE SPEED THEY CAN TRAVEL!
HAN, HE SAYS THAT ALONG WITH THEIR OTHER PICKINGS... THEY HAVE SOME LOOSE DRUMS OF SKYHOOPER PROPELLANT. GIVE YOU ANY IDEAS?
THAT'S IT, CHEWIE! HEAVE 'EM OUT!
NOT TOO CLOSE TOGETHER .. WE WANT 'EM SPREAD ACROSS THE PLAIN.
LUKE'S ON THE ROOF TO TAKE CARE OF THE REST.
BLAST THE WAY THIS LUMBERING MONSTROSITY RATTLES AND SHAKES!
STILL... THIS SHOULDN'T BE ANY TOUGHER THAN POTTING WOMP RATS FROM A LAND-SPEEDER WITH UNCLE OWEN'S OUTMODED OLD ENERGY RIFLE.
COME TO THINK OF IT... THAT WAS PRETTY TOUGH!
FTOOM! FTOOM! FTOOM!


BUT DESPITE CONCERN... LUKE'S SHOTS ARE TRUE. PROPELLANT DRUMS EXPLODE IN A FIERY SPRAY...
...PRODUCING A CHAIN REACTION THAT TOUCHES ALL THE DRUMS SPREAD ACROSS THE PLAIN...
...UNTIL A MASSIVE WALL OF FLAME RISES BEFORE THE PURSUING CARRIERS OF THE EMPIRE'S TROOPS! THE WARRIORS ARE LEFT BUT ONE CHOICE. HALT...
...OR BE DESTROYED!
KA-VWOOM!


THAT SAVED US, LUKE... FOR THE MOMENT. BUT THEY'RE BOUND TO HAVE SIGNALLED AHEAD TO MOS EISLEY--
--AND WE CAN'T EXACTLY SNEAK INTO THERE WITH A SANDCRAWLER!
BUT, HAN, IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER THAT WE REACH THE MILLENNIUM FALCON AND GET OFF TATOOINE!
THE ALLIANCE HAS TO KNOW WHAT THE HOUSE OF TAGGE HAS CREATED HERE!
MAY WE MAKE A SUGGESTION, SIR?
THREEPIO! ARTOO! BUT. . YOU WERE SHUT DOWN...!
THE JAWAS REVIVED US. THEY SEEM TO HAVE A LITTLE OF EVERYTHING... INCLUDING COOLANT. NOT AS CLEAN AS ONE MIGHT PREFER... BUT USABLE.
IT WAS RATHER TRAUMATIC TO AWAKE AND SUDDENLY BEHOLD THE HORRID LITTLE-- AH-- OUR NEW ALLIES! BUT ONCE THE SITUATION WAS MADE CLEAR--
--I REASONED THAT IF THEIR COOLANT WORKS IN US... IT WILL REVIVE OUR AILING LANDSPEEDER TOO!
VREET!
OH, VERY WELL, ARTOO... YOU REASONED IT! THE MAIN THING IS WE CAN REACH MOS EISLEY.
AND...
SINCE THE IMPERIALS ARE AFTER A SANDCRAWLER... THIS SHOULD DO THE TRICK, KID.
RIGHT, HAN! AND OUR FRIENDS, THE JAWAS, CAN LOSE THEMSELVES IN THE DUNE SEA.
TAGGE'S SCHEME MAY NOT BE FINISHED..BUT NEITHER ARE WE!
NEXT ISSUE
IN THE DEPTHS OF SPACE...LUKE SKYWALKER VS. BARON TAGGE!
SABER CLASH!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STAR WARS
LUKE IN A SHOWDOWN BATTLE FOR HIS LIFE!
INFANTINO/ WISCER
SABER CLASH!

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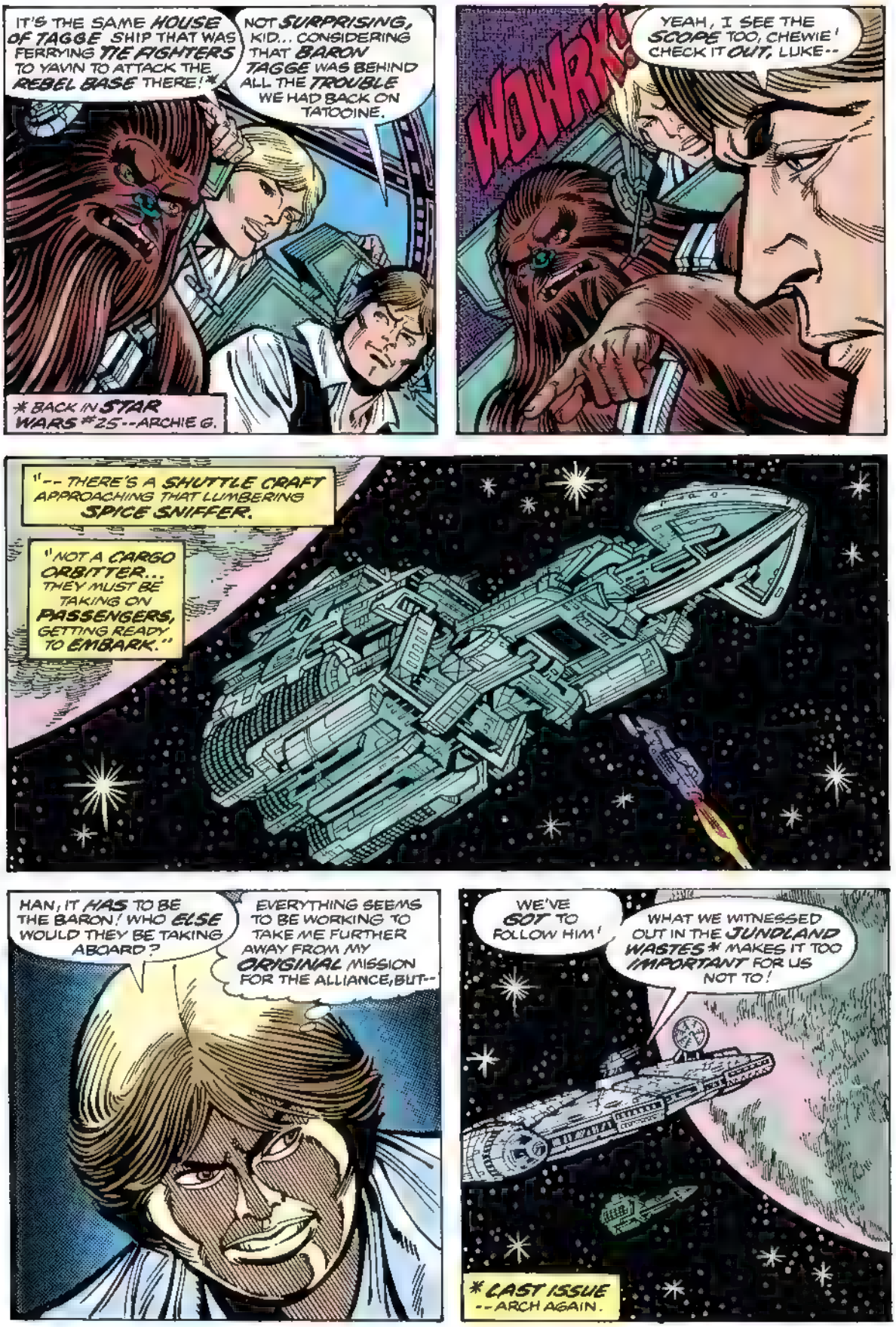
ARCHIE GOODWIN WRITER/EDITOR • CARMINE INFANTINO and GENE DAY ARTISTS • JOHN COSTANZA LETTERER • PETRA GOLDBERG COLORIST • JIM SHOOTER CONSULTING EDITOR

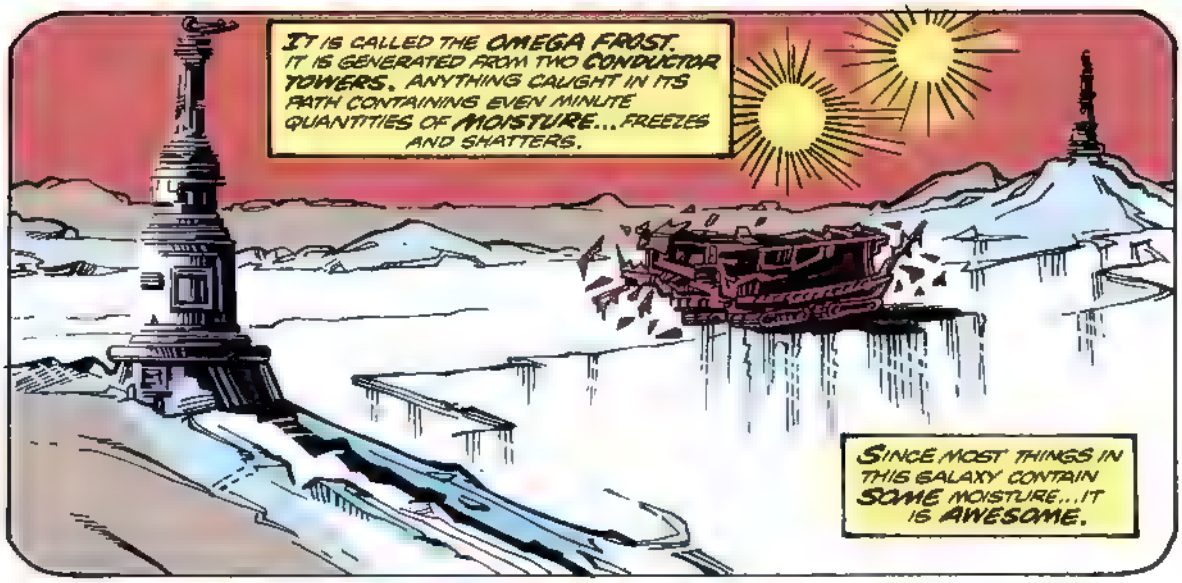
OUTWARD BOUND! THE MILLENNIUM FALCON SOARS AWAY FROM THE LOOMING BULK OF TATOOINE... PUTTING LUKE, HAN, CHEWIE, AND THE DROIDS A SIGH OF RELIEF REMOVED FROM WHAT BEN KENOBI ONCE REFERRED TO AS "IMPERIAL ENTANGLEMENTS."

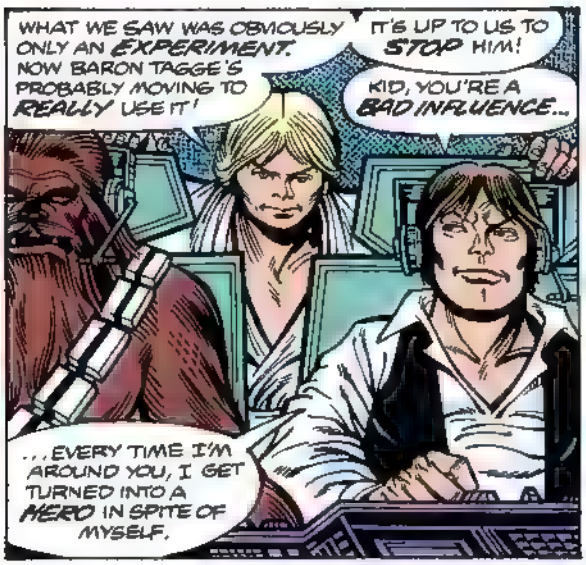
MAKE THAT A SHORT SIGH OF RELIEF.

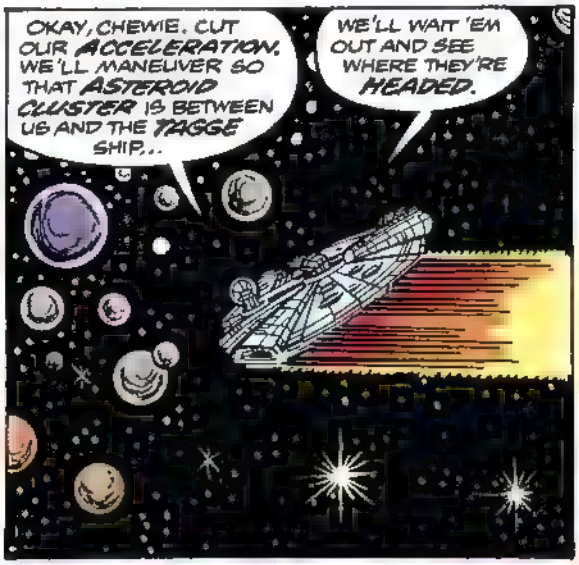
HAN! THAT MINING EXPLORER...! I RECOGNIZE IT!

SABER CLASH!

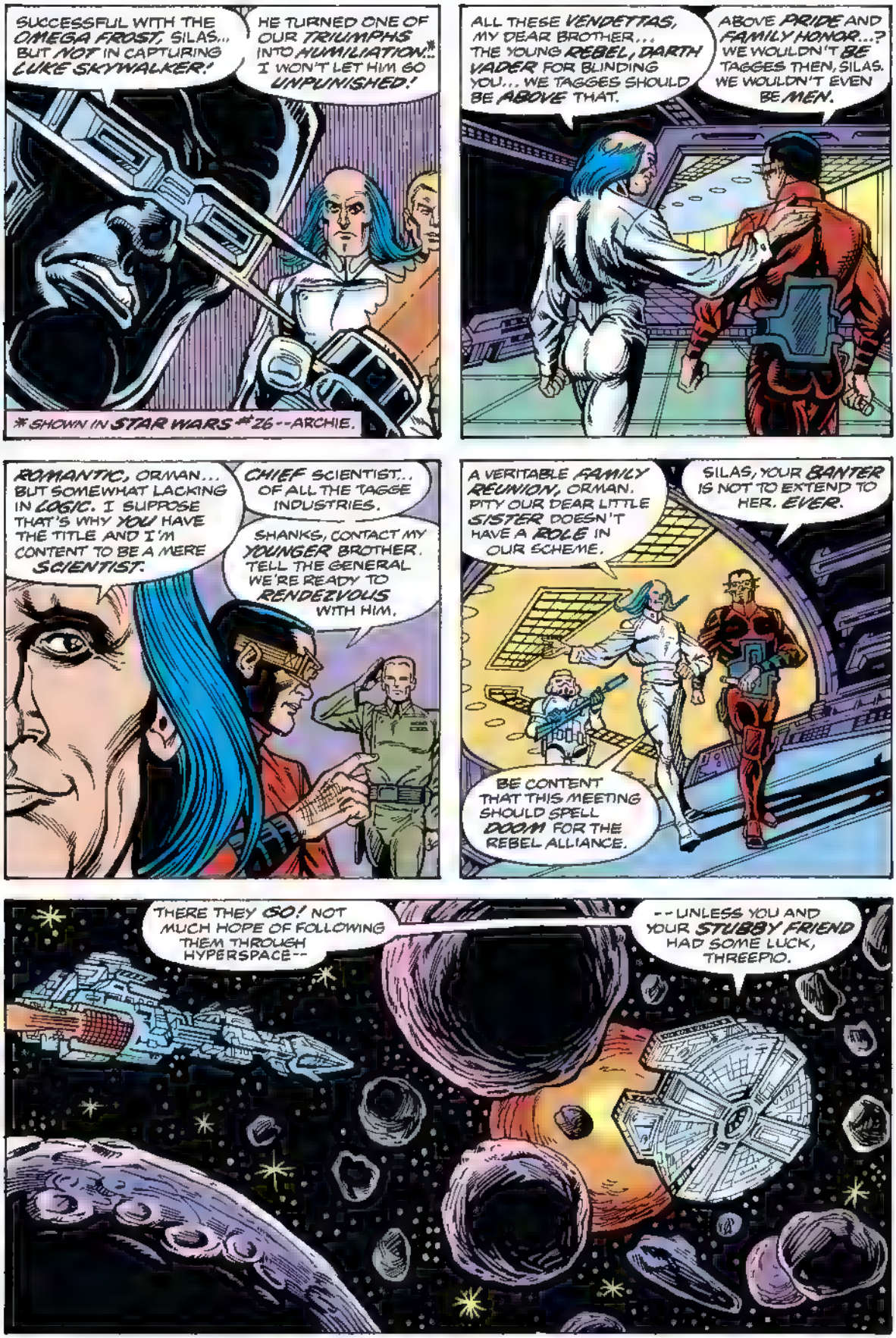

IT'S THE SAME HOUSE OF TAGGE SHIP THAT WAS FERRYING TIE FIGHTERS TO YAVIN TO ATTACK THE REBEL BASE THERE!*
NOT SURPRISING, KID... CONSIDERING THAT BARON TAGGE WAS BEHIND ALL THE TROUBLE WE HAD BACK ON TATOOINE.
* BACK IN STAR WARS #25--ARCHIE G.
HOWRK!
YEAH, I SEE THE SCOPE TOO, CHEWIE! CHECK IT OUT, LUKE--
"-- THERE'S A SHUTTLE CRAFT APPROACHING THAT LUMBERING SPICE SNIFFER.
"NOT A CARGO ORBITTER... THEY MUST BE TAKING ON PASSENGERS, GETTING READY TO EMBARK."
HAN, IT HAS TO BE THE BARON! WHO ELSE WOULD THEY BE TAKING ABOARD?
EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE WORKING TO TAKE ME FURTHER AWAY FROM MY ORIGINAL MISSION FOR THE ALLIANCE, BUT--
WE'VE GOT TO FOLLOW HIM!
WHAT WE WITNESSED OUT IN THE JUNDLAND WASTES* MAKES IT TOO IMPORTANT FOR US NOT TO!
* LAST ISSUE --ARCH AGAIN.

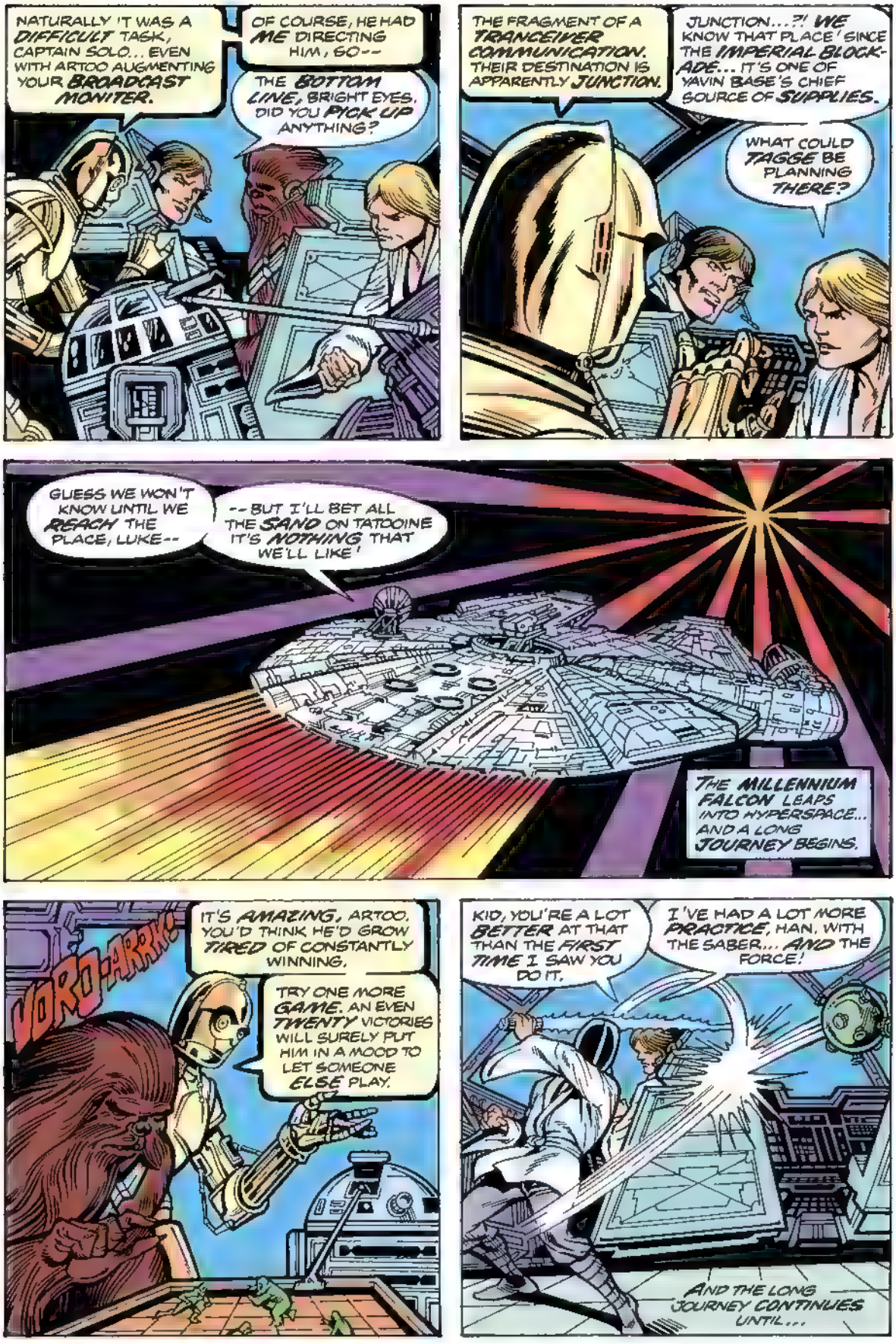

IT IS CALLED THE OMEGA FROST. IT IS GENERATED FROM TWO CONDUCTOR TOWERS. ANYTHING CAUGHT IN ITS PATH CONTAINING EVEN MINUTE QUANTITIES OF MOISTURE... FREEZES AND SHATTERS.
SINCE MOST THINGS IN THIS GALAXY CONTAIN SOME MOISTURE... IT IS AWESOME.

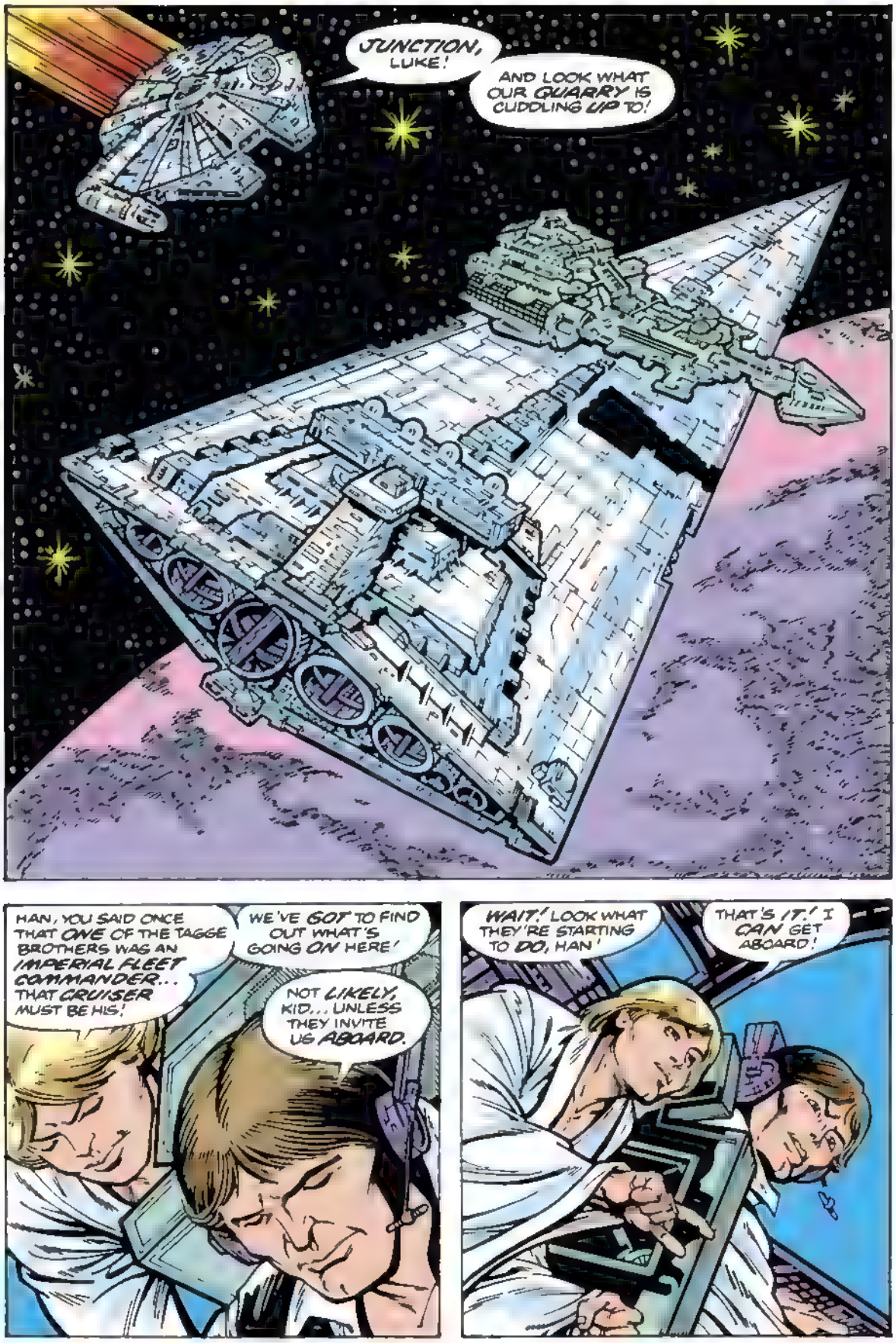

WHAT WE SAW WAS OBVIOUSLY ONLY AN EXPERIMENT. NOW BARON TAGGE'S PROBABLY MOVING TO REALLY USE IT!
IT'S UP TO US TO STOP HIM!
KID, YOU'RE A BAD INFLUENCE...
...EVERY TIME I'M AROUND YOU, I GET TURNED INTO A HERO IN SPITE OF MYSELF.

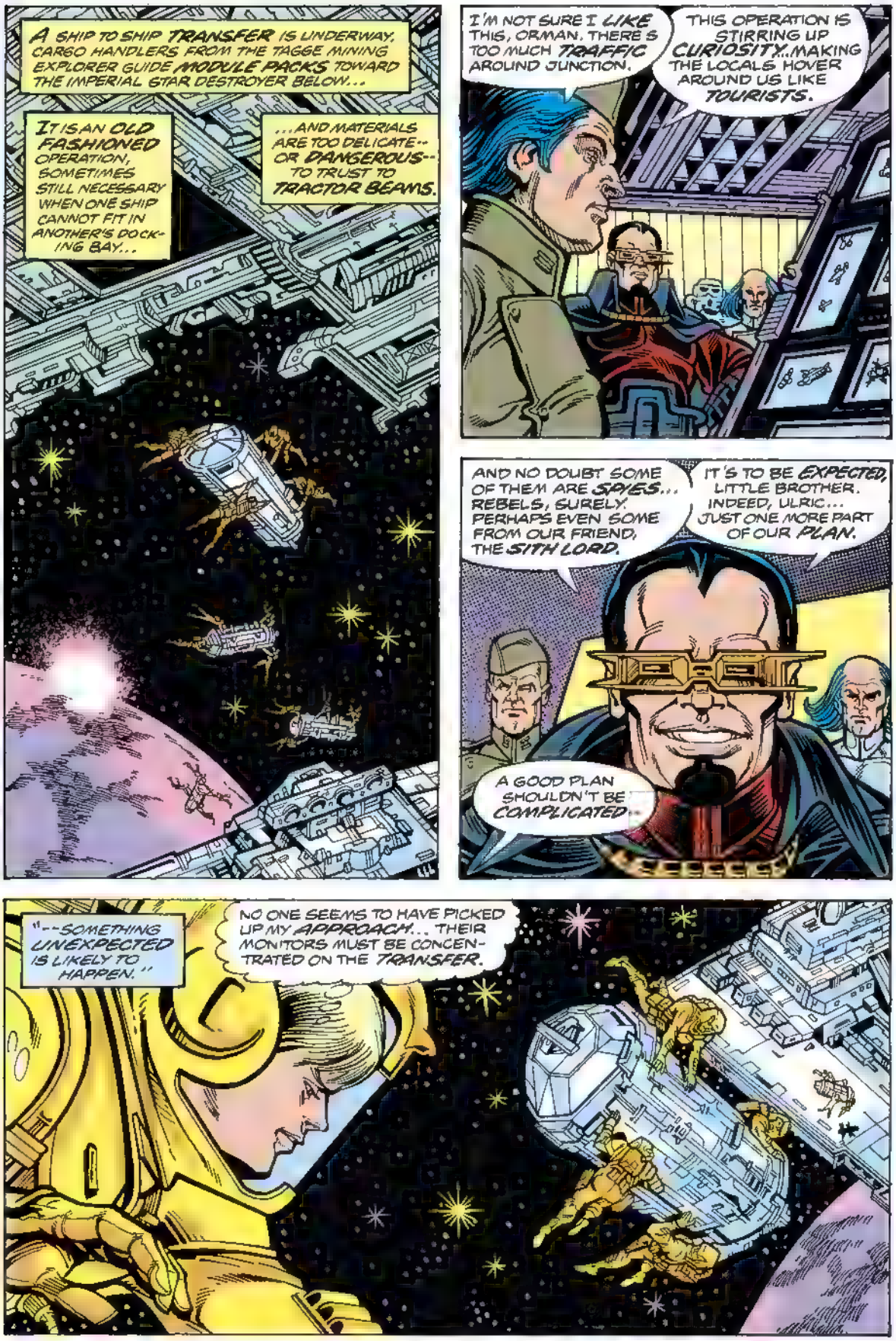

OKAY, CHEWIE. CUT OUR ACCELERATION. WE'LL MANEUVER SO THAT ASTEROID CLUSTER IS BETWEEN US AND THE TAGGE SHIP...
WE'LL WAIT 'EM OUT AND SEE WHERE THEY'RE HEADED.

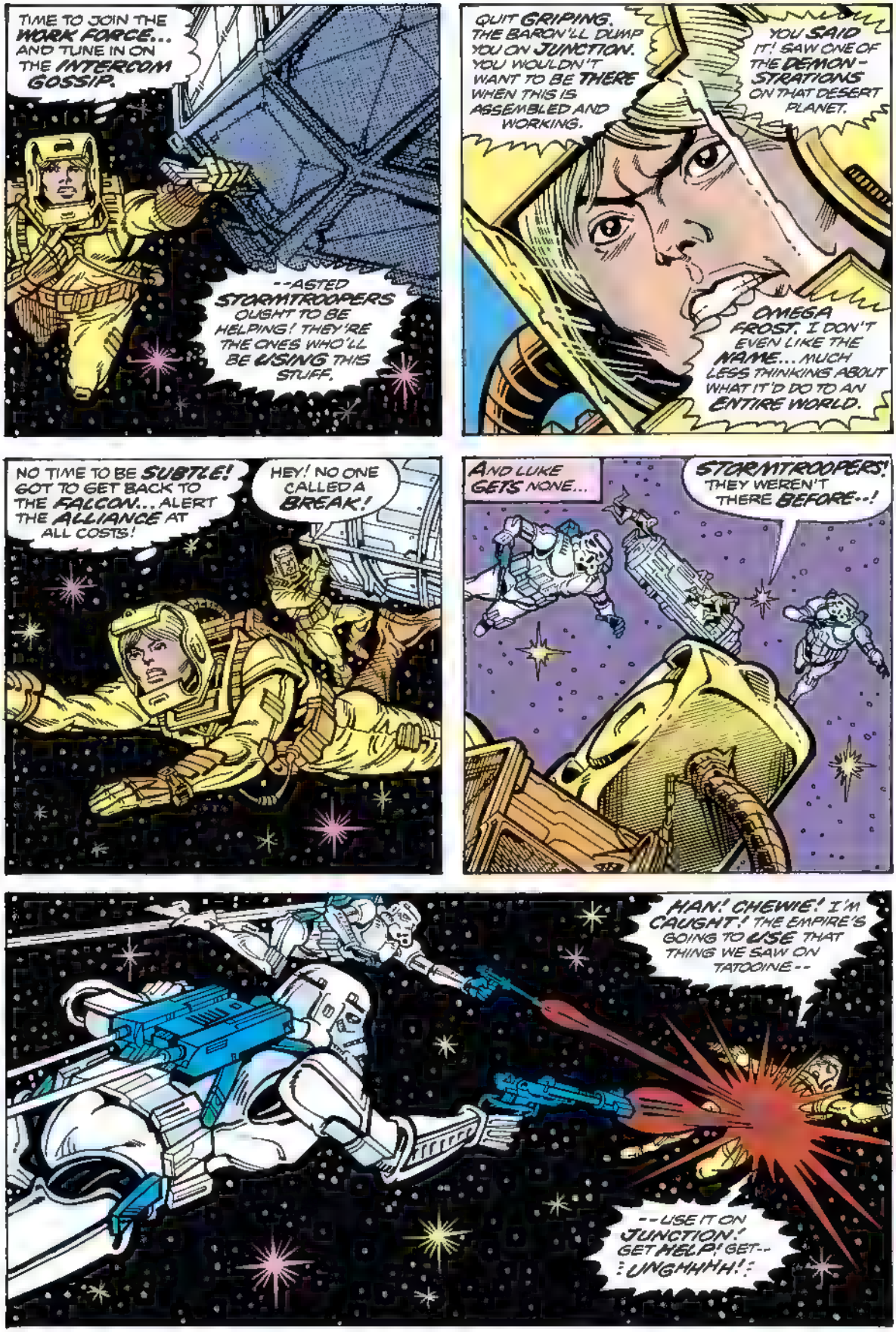
MEANTIME, IN THE DOCKING BAY OF THE SPICE EXPLORER...
REALLY, ORMAN... THIS EMOTIONAL OUTBURST IS UNWARRANTED.
WE WERE REMARKABLY SUCCESSFUL ON TATOOINE.
SYRAAAAAAAAK


SUCCESSFUL WITH THE OMEGA FROST, SILAS... BUT NOT IN CAPTURING LUKE SKYWALKER!
HE TURNED ONE OF OUR TRIUMPHS INTO HUMILIATION.* I WON'T LET HIM GO UNPUNISHED!
*SHOWN IN STAR WARS #26--ARCHIE.
ALL THESE VENDETTAS, MY DEAR BROTHER... THE YOUNG REBEL, DARTH VADER FOR BLINDING YOU... WE TAGGES SHOULD BE ABOVE THAT.
ABOVE PRIDE AND FAMILY HONOR...? WE WOULDN'T BE TAGGES THEN, SILAS. WE WOULDN'T EVEN BE MEN.
ROMANTIC, ORMAN... BUT SOMEWHAT LACKING IN LOGIC. I SUPPOSE THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE THE TITLE AND I'M CONTENT TO BE A MERE SCIENTIST.
CHIEF SCIENTIST... OF ALL THE TAGGE INDUSTRIES.
SHANKS, CONTACT MY YOUNGER BROTHER. TELL THE GENERAL WE'RE READY TO RENDEZVOUS WITH HIM.
A VERITABLE FAMILY REUNION, ORMAN. PITY OUR DEAR LITTLE SISTER DOESN'T HAVE A ROLE IN OUR SCHEME.
SILAS, YOUR BANTER IS NOT TO EXTEND TO HER. EVER.
BE CONTENT THAT THIS MEETING SHOULD SPELL DOOM FOR THE REBEL ALLIANCE.
THERE THEY GO! NOT MUCH HOPE OF FOLLOWING THEM THROUGH HYPERSPACE--
--UNLESS YOU AND YOUR STUBBY FRIEND HAD SOME LUCK, THREEPIO.

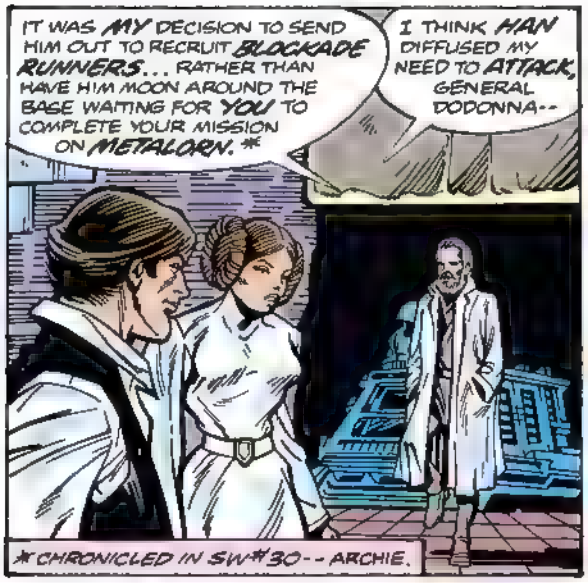

NATURALLY IT WAS A DIFFICULT TASK, CAPTAIN SOLO... EVEN WITH ARTOO AUGMENTING YOUR BROADCAST MONITER.
OF COURSE, HE HAD ME DIRECTING HIM, SO--
THE BOTTOM LINE, BRIGHT EYES, DID YOU PICK UP ANYTHING?
THE FRAGMENT OF A TRANCEIVER COMMUNICATION. THEIR DESTINATION IS APPARENTLY JUNCTION.
JUNCTION...?! WE KNOW THAT PLACE! SINCE THE IMPERIAL BLOCKADE... IT'S ONE OF YAVIN BASE'S CHIEF SOURCE OF SUPPLIES.
WHAT COULD TAGGE BE PLANNING THERE?
GUESS WE WON'T KNOW UNTIL WE REACH THE PLACE, LUKE--
--BUT I'LL BET ALL THE SAND ON TATOOINE IT'S NOTHING THAT WE'LL LIKE!
THE MILLENNIUM FALCON LEAPS INTO HYPERSPACE... AND A LONG JOURNEY BEGINS.
VORO-ARRK!
IT'S AMAZING, ARTOO. YOU'D THINK HE'D GROW TIRED OF CONSTANTLY WINNING.
TRY ONE MORE GAME. AN EVEN TWENTY VICTORIES WILL SURELY PUT HIM IN A MOOD TO LET SOMEONE ELSE PLAY.
KID, YOU'RE A LOT BETTER AT THAT THAN THE FIRST TIME I SAW YOU DO IT.
I'VE HAD A LOT MORE PRACTICE, HAN, WITH THE SABER... AND THE FORCE!
AND THE LONG JOURNEY CONTINUES UNTIL...


JUNCTION, LUKE!
AND LOOK WHAT OUR QUARRY IS CUDDLING UP TO!
HAN, YOU SAID ONCE THAT ONE OF THE TAGGE BROTHERS WAS AN IMPERIAL FLEET COMMANDER... THAT CRUISER MUST BE HIS!
WE'VE GOT TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON HERE!
NOT LIKELY, KID... UNLESS THEY INVITE US ABOARD.
WAIT! LOOK WHAT THEY'RE STARTING TO DO, HAN!
THAT'S IT! I CAN GET ABOARD!

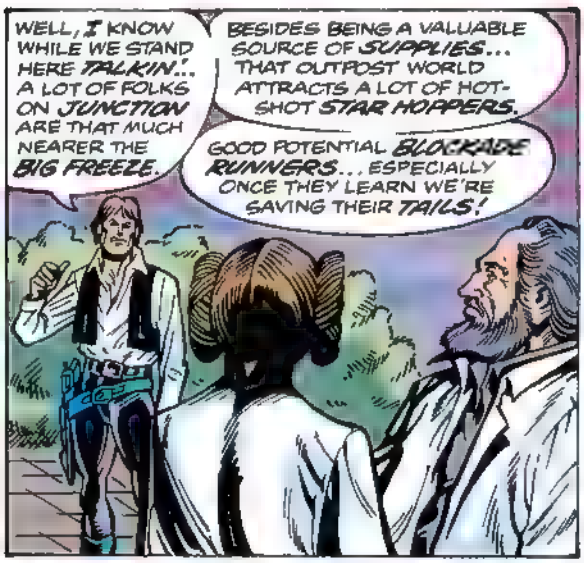

A SHIP TO SHIP TRANSFER IS UNDERWAY. CARGO HANDLERS FROM THE TAGGE MINING EXPLORER GUIDE MODULE PACKS TOWARD THE IMPERIAL STAR DESTROYER BELOW...
IT IS AN OLD FASHIONED OPERATION, SOMETIMES STILL NECESSARY WHEN ONE SHIP CANNOT FIT IN ANOTHER'S DOCKING BAY...
...AND MATERIALS ARE TOO DELICATE-- OR DANGEROUS-- TO TRUST TO TRACTOR BEAMS.
I'M NOT SURE I LIKE THIS, ORMAN. THERE'S TOO MUCH TRAFFIC AROUND JUNCTION.
THIS OPERATION IS STIRRING UP CURIOSITY...MAKING THE LOCALS HOVER AROUND US LIKE TOURISTS.
AND NO DOUBT SOME OF THEM ARE SPIES... REBELS, SURELY. PERHAPS EVEN SOME FROM OUR FRIEND, THE SITH LORD.
IT'S TO BE EXPECTED, LITTLE BROTHER. INDEED, ULRIC... JUST ONE MORE PART OF OUR PLAN.
A GOOD PLAN SHOULDN'T BE COMPLICATED...
"--SOMETHING UNEXPECTED IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN."
NO ONE SEEMS TO HAVE PICKED UP MY APPROACH... THEIR MONITORS MUST BE CONCENTRATED ON THE TRANSFER.

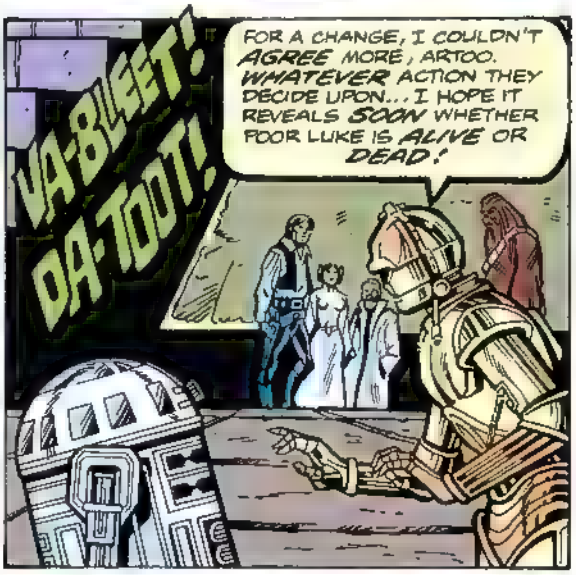

TIME TO JOIN THE WORK FORCE... AND TUNE IN ON THE INTERCOM GOSSIP.
--ASTED STORMTROOPERS OUGHT TO BE HELPING! THEY'RE THE ONES WHO'LL BE USING THIS STUFF.
QUIT GRIPING. THE BARON'LL DUMP YOU ON JUNCTION. YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO BE THERE WHEN THIS IS ASSEMBLED AND WORKING.
YOU SAID IT! SAW ONE OF THE DEMON-STRATIONS ON THAT DESERT PLANET.
OMEGA FROST. I DON'T EVEN LIKE THE NAME... MUCH LESS THINKING ABOUT WHAT IT'D DO TO AN ENTIRE WORLD.
NO TIME TO BE SUBTLE! GOT TO GET BACK TO THE FALCON... ALERT THE ALLIANCE AT ALL COSTS!
HEY! NO ONE CALLED A BREAK!
AND LUKE GETS NONE...
STORMTROOPERS! THEY WEREN'T THERE BEFORE..!
HAN! CHEWIE! I'M CAUGHT! THE EMPIRE'S GOING TO USE THAT THING WE SAW ON TATOOINE--
--USE IT ON JUNCTION! GET HELP! GET-- UNGMHHH!

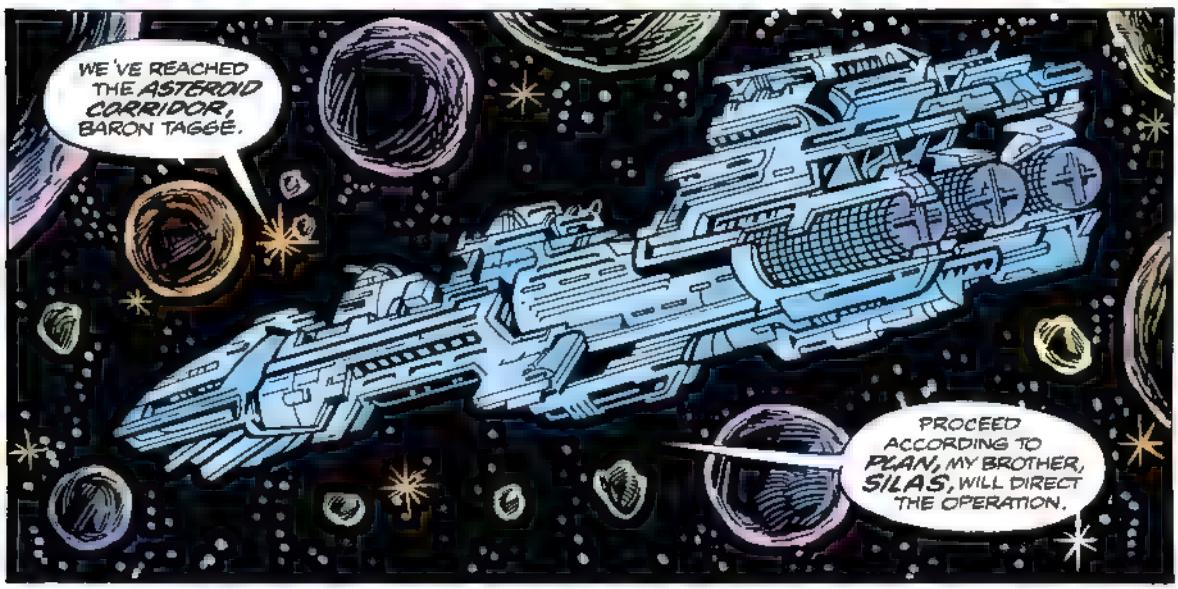
AW... NO, KID!
WHY DIDN'T YOU LET ME TALK YOU OUT OF THIS CRAZY STUNT LIKE I TRIED TO DO?
HARRAWRGH
YEAH. YEAH. YOU'RE RIGHT, CHEWIE MAYBE THEY ONLY STUN-BLASTED HIM.
WHATEVER'S HAPPENED, I GOTTA GET HOLD OF MYSELF.. GET US AWAY FROM HERE.
WE'LL BRING WORD TO THE REBELS LIKE LUKE WANTED IF WE HAVE TO WARP STRAIGHT [illegible] HALF THE BATTLE WAGONS IN THE IMPERIAL BLOCKADE!
BUT THERE'S ONE PARTICULAR REBEL I DON'T RELISH BREAKING THE NEWS TO.
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT, HAN SOLO! LUKE HAS THE EXCUSE OF BEING YOUNG AND EAGER... BUT YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER!
HOW DID I EVER BECOME INVOLVED WITH TWO MEN SO BRAVE... AND SO STUPID?!
I DON'T THINK YOU MEAN THAT, YOUR ROYALNESS. BUT IF BEING ANGRY HELPS... LAY IT ON.
PERHAPS IT SHOULD BE DIRECTED AT ME, PRINCESS LEIA--


IT WAS MY DECISION TO SEND HIM OUT TO RECRUIT BLOCKADE RUNNERS... RATHER THAN HAVE HIM MOON AROUND THE BASE WAITING FOR YOU TO COMPLETE YOUR MISSION ON METALORN.*
I THINK HAN DIFFUSED MY NEED TO ATTACK, GENERAL DODONNA--
*CHRONICLED IN SW#30--ARCHIE.

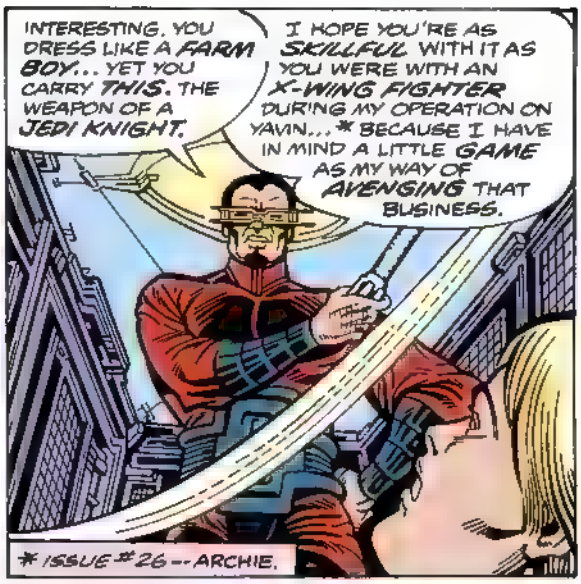
--BUT IT SEEMS LIKE AN ASSIGNMENT ANYONE MIGHT HAVE HANDLED. WITH LUKE'S WAY OF STUMBLING INTO TROUBLE..
I CONSIDERED THAT, YOUR HIGHNESS. BUT DOES HE STUMBLE.., OR IS HE GUIDED?
WE ALL SPEAK OF THE FORCE... BUT SKYWALKER SEEMS TRULY TOUCHED BY IT. PERHAPS IN MORE WAYS THAN WE KNOW.


WELL, I KNOW WHILE WE STAND HERE TALKIN'.. A LOT OF FOLKS ON JUNCTION ARE THAT MUCH NEARER THE BIG FREEZE.
BESIDES BEING A VALUABLE SOURCE OF SUPPLIES... THAT OUTPOST WORLD ATTRACTS A LOT OF HOT-SHOT STAR HOPPERS.
GOOD POTENTIAL BLOCKADE RUNNERS... ESPECIALLY ONCE THEY LEARN WE'RE SAVING THEIR TAILS!

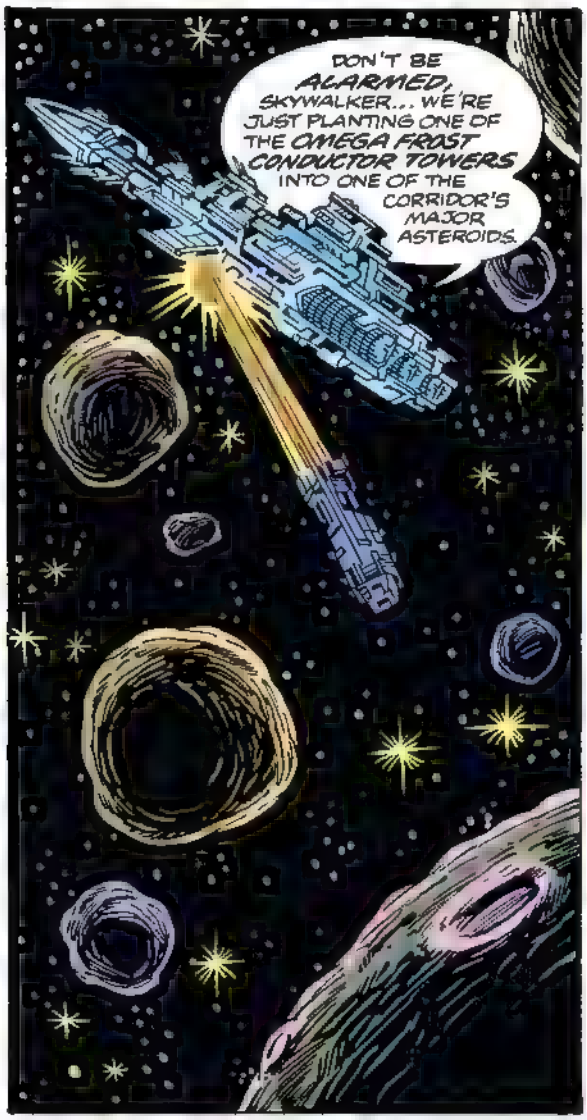

VA-BLEET! DA-TOOT!
FOR A CHANGE, I COULDN'T AGREE MORE, ARTOO. WHATEVER ACTION THEY DECIDE UPON... I HOPE IT REVEALS SOON WHETHER POOR LUKE IS ALIVE OR DEAD!

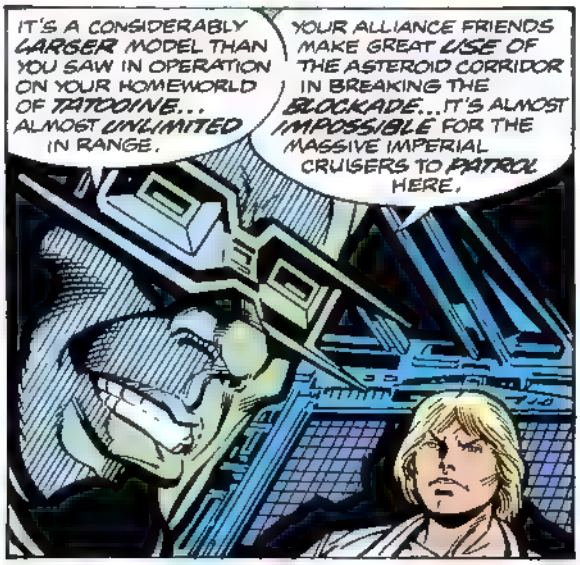

WE'VE REACHED THE ASTEROID CORRIDOR, BARON TAGGE.
PROCEED ACCORDING TO PLAN, MY BROTHER, SILAS, WILL DIRECT THE OPERATION.

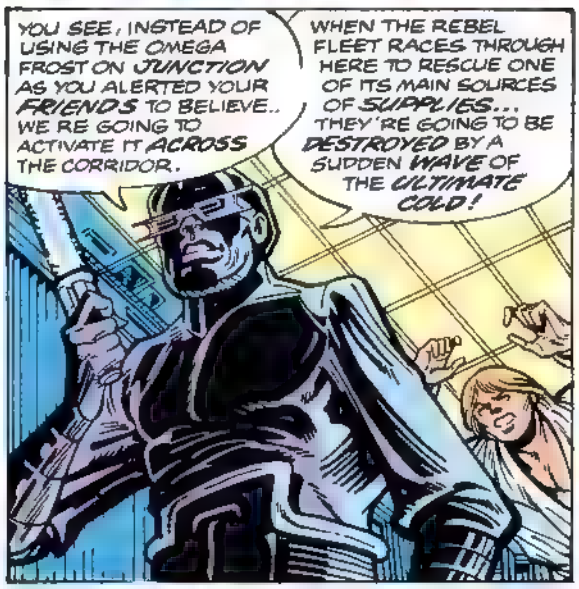
I WISH TO CHAT WITH OUR YOUNG GUEST NOW THAT HE'S AWAKE.
YOU'RE AUDACIOUS, REBEL. IF I HADN'T BEEN FAMILIARIZING MYSELF WITH YOUR FACE FROM OFFICIAL RECORDS... I MIGHT HAVE MISSED YOU ON THE MONITORS DURING THE TRANSFER AT JUNCTION.


INTERESTING. YOU DRESS LIKE A FARM BOY... YET YOU CARRY THIS. THE WEAPON OF A JEDI KNIGHT.
I HOPE YOU'RE AS SKILLFUL WITH IT AS YOU WERE WITH AN X-WING FIGHTER DURING MY OPERATION ON YAVIN... * BECAUSE I HAVE IN MIND A LITTLE GAME AS MY WAY OF AVENGING THAT BUSINESS.
* ISSUE #26 -- ARCHIE.

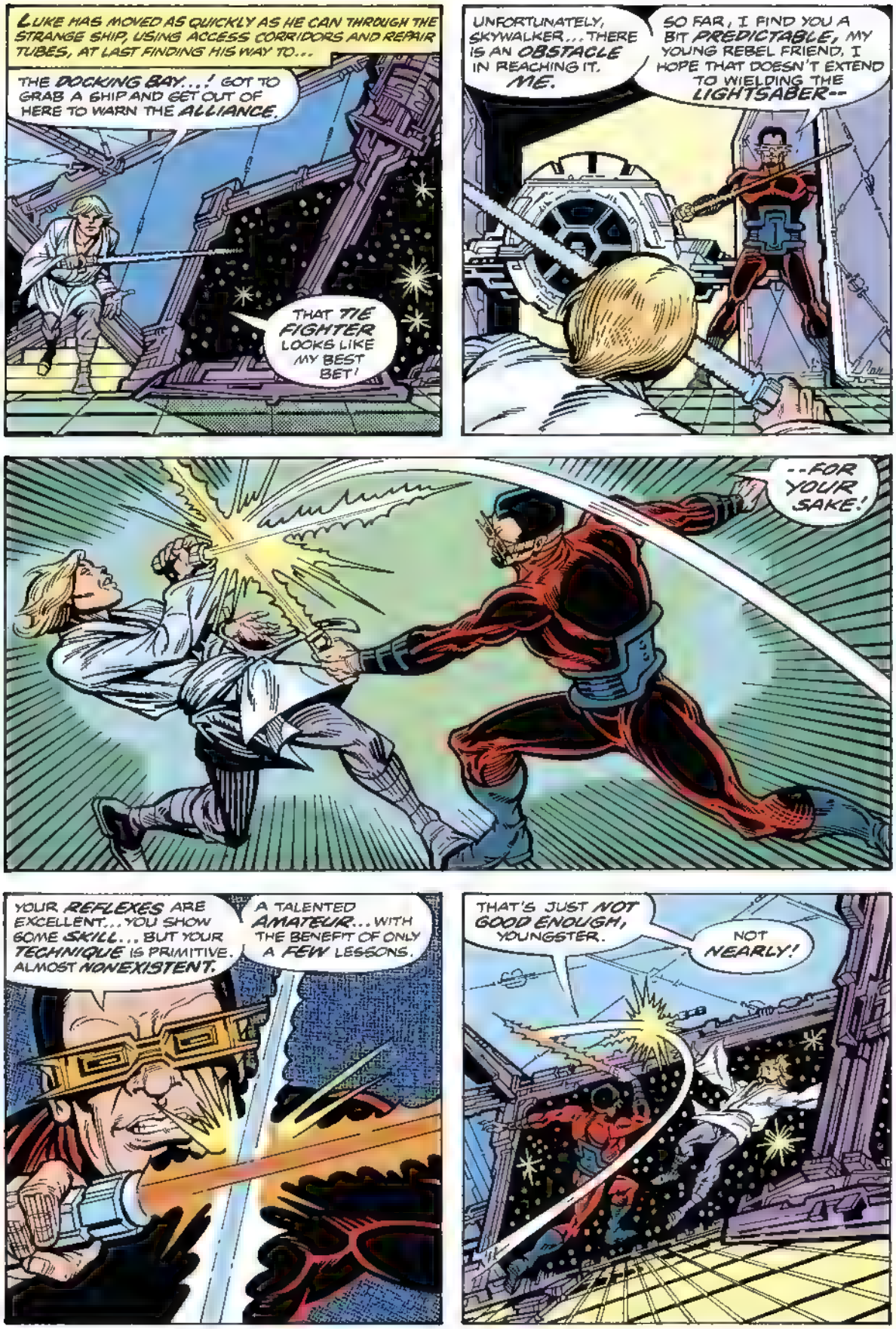
BEFORE LUKE CAN RESPOND IN ANY WAY... A GREAT VIBRATION SHAKES THE TAGGE MINING EXPLORER!

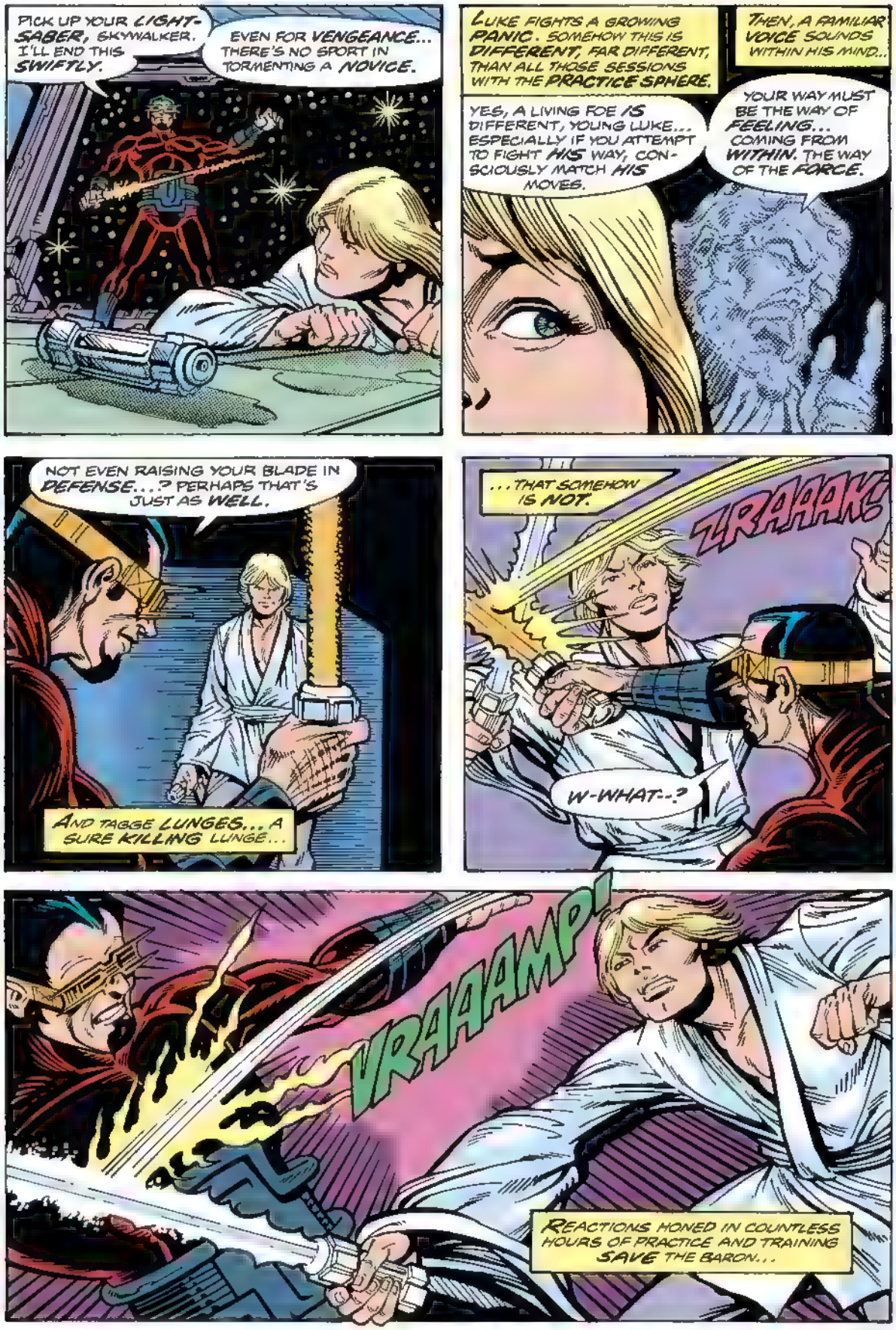

DON'T BE ALARMED, SKYWALKER... WE'RE JUST PLANTING ONE OF THE OMEGA FROST CONDUCTOR TOWERS INTO ONE OF THE CORRIDOR'S MAJOR ASTEROIDS.


IT'S A CONSIDERABLY LARGER MODEL THAN YOU SAW IN OPERATION ON YOUR HOMEWORLD OF TATOOINE... ALMOST UNLIMITED IN RANGE.
YOUR ALLIANCE FRIENDS MAKE GREAT USE OF THE ASTEROID CORRIDOR IN BREAKING THE BLOCKADE... IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE MASSIVE IMPERIAL CRUISERS TO PATROL HERE.


YOU SEE, INSTEAD OF USING THE OMEGA FROST ON JUNCTION AS YOU ALERTED YOUR FRIENDS TO BELIEVE.. WE'RE GOING TO ACTIVATE IT ACROSS THE CORRIDOR.
WHEN THE REBEL FLEET RACES THROUGH HERE TO RESCUE ONE OF ITS MAIN SOURCES OF SUPPLIES... THEY'RE GOING TO BE DESTROYED BY A SUDDEN WAVE OF THE ULTIMATE COLD!

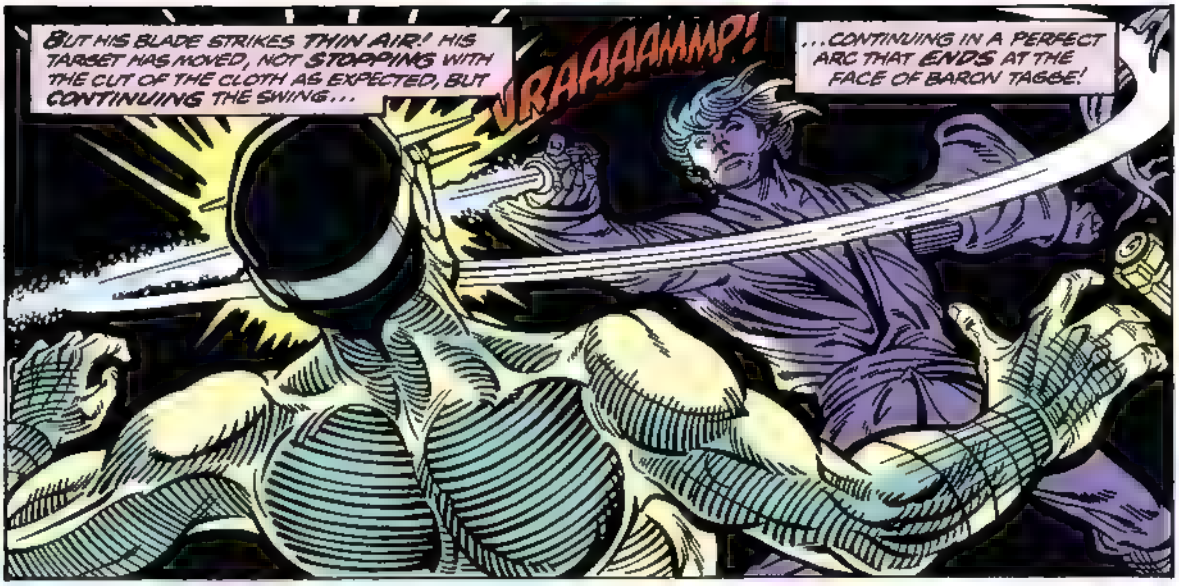
NO!
IT IS A RASH ACT OF ANGER AND DESPERATION. AGAINST A MAN OF THE SKILL AND EXPERIENCE OF BARON TAGGE, IT SHOULDN'T SUCCEED...
...YET, SOMEHOW, IT DOES.
PERHAPS.
MY PRISONER HAS ESCAPED... AS I PLANNED. ALERT ALL PERSONNEL TO STAY OUT OF HIS WAY AND MAKE NO ATTEMPT TO INTERFERE.
MEANTIME, TELL MY CREW TO PROCEED TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE ASTEROID CORRIDOR... MY LITTLE GAME SHOULDN'T INTERRUPT GETTING THE FINAL CONDUCTOR TOWER INTO POSITION.
LIGHTSABER OPPONENTS ARE DIFFICULT TO FIND IN THIS AGE OF BLASTERS, LUKE SKYWALKER... I HOPE YOU CAN PROVIDE ME WITH VALUABLE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE.
WHEN THE DAY COMES THAT I CHALLENGE DARTH VADER WITH THE VERY SAME WEAPON HE USED TO BLIND ME--
--IT WILL BE MOST USEFUL TO KNOW THAT MY KILLING TECHNIQUES WORK--
--BECAUSE I HAVE PROVEN THEM ON YOU!

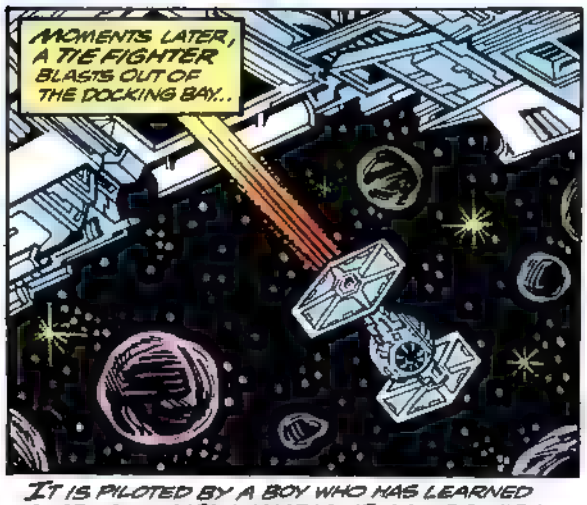

LUKE HAS MOVED AS QUICKLY AS HE CAN THROUGH THE STRANGE SHIP, USING ACCESS CORRIDORS AND REPAIR TUBES, AT LAST FINDING HIS WAY TO...
THE DOCKING BAY...! GOT TO GRAB A SHIP AND GET OUT OF HERE TO WARN THE ALLIANCE.
THAT TIE FIGHTER LOOKS LIKE MY BEST BET!
UNFORTUNATELY, SKYWALKER... THERE IS AN OBSTACLE IN REACHING IT. ME.
SO FAR, I FIND YOU A BIT PREDICTABLE, MY YOUNG REBEL FRIEND, I HOPE THAT DOESN'T EXTEND TO WIELDING THE LIGHTSABER--
--FOR YOUR SAKE!
YOUR REFLEXES ARE EXCELLENT... YOU SHOW SOME SKILL... BUT YOUR TECHNIQUE IS PRIMITIVE. ALMOST NONEXISTENT.
A TALENTED AMATEUR... WITH THE BENEFIT OF ONLY A FEW LESSONS.
THAT'S JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH, YOUNGSTER.
NOT NEARLY!


PICK UP YOUR LIGHT-SABER, SKYWALKER. I'LL END THIS SWIFTLY.
EVEN FOR VENGEANCE... THERE'S NO SPORT IN TORMENTING A NOVICE.
LUKE FIGHTS A GROWING PANIC. SOMEHOW THIS IS DIFFERENT, FAR DIFFERENT, THAN ALL THOSE SESSIONS WITH THE PRACTICE SPHERE.
THEN, A FAMILIAR VOICE SOUNDS WITHIN HIS MIND...
YES, A LIVING FOE IS DIFFERENT, YOUNG LUKE... ESPECIALLY IF YOU ATTEMPT TO FIGHT HIS WAY, CONSCIOUSLY MATCH HIS MOVES.
YOUR WAY MUST BE THE WAY OF FEELING... COMING FROM WITHIN. THE WAY OF THE FORCE.
NOT EVEN RAISING YOUR BLADE IN DEFENSE...? PERHAPS THAT'S JUST AS WELL.
AND TAGGE LUNGES... A SURE KILLING LUNGE...
...THAT SOMEHOW IS NOT.
ZRAAAAK!
W-WHAT--?
VRAAAMP!
REACTIONS HONED IN COUNTLESS HOURS OF PRACTICE AND TRAINING SAVE THE BARON...

BUT SUDDENLY HE REALIZES A MUCH DIFFERENT BATTLE IS BEING FOUGHT THAN THE ONE HE BEGAN...
...AND TO WIN THAT BATTLE, EVEN WITH ALL HIS CONSIDERABLE SKILL...
...HE MUST FIGHT FOR HIS LIFE!
YET FOR EVERY STUNNING ATTACK AND COUNTER-ATTACK PATTERN TAGGE LAUNCHES... THE BOY'S LIGHT BLADE IS THERE!
LUKE'S STROKES ARE AWKWARD... UNORTHODOX... COMING FROM NO TRAINING PRINCIPLES OR FIGHTING SYSTEMS THE BARON HAS EVER ENCOUNTERED..
.. AND HIS MIND SEEMS FOCUSED ON SOMETHING BEYOND THE COMBAT.
FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HE ACHIEVED MASTERY OF THE LIGHTSABER... BARON TAGGE FEELS THE NEED TO GIVE GROUND!
THERE'S MORE TO YOU THAN MEETS THE EYE, SKYWALKER.. YOU'VE THE TOUCH OF THE WIZARD ABOUT YOU, LIKE THAT BLASTED DARTH VADER!
TIME FOR A NEW STRATEGY..
VER-RAAANK!
--THE FINAL STRATEGY I WAS SAVING TO DISPATCH THE DARK LORD HIMSELF!

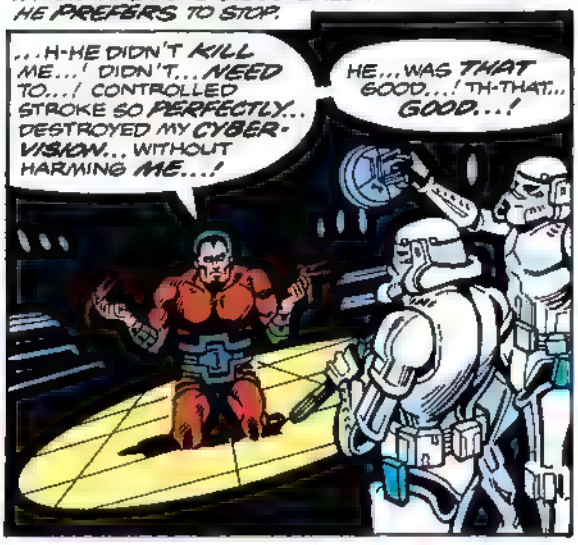
WITH THE SUDDEN FLARE OF SHORTED CIRCUITRY...THE DOCKING BAY PLUNGES INTO DARKNESS.
DARKNESS PIERCED ONLY BY THE GLOW OF A SOLITARY LIGHT-SABER.
THAT... AND THE CYBER-VISION OF BARON TAGGE.
MECHANIZED SIGHT HAS SOME ADVANTAGES, MY YOUNG FRIEND...
...BUT I WON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOU TWICE. TO FIGHT AS YOU HAVE SO FAR, ALL YOUR SENSES MUST BE EXCEPTIONAL.
AND SINCE YOU'RE SO INTENT--
--I'M GIVING THOSE SENSES SOMETHING TO DETECT!
THE WHISPER OF CLOTH. SLIGHT. BUT ENOUGH. ENOUGH TO MAKE LUKE REACT...
...ENOUGH TO GIVE TAGGE THE UNPROTECTED TARGET HE HAS BEEN WAITING FOR!
LIGHTSABER CLICKED ON... THE BARON LUNGES FOR THE KILL!


BUT HIS BLADE STRIKES THIN AIR! HIS TARGET HAS MOVED, NOT STOPPING WITH THE CUT OF THE CLOTH AS EXPECTED, BUT CONTINUING THE SWING...
VRAAAAMMP!
...CONTINUING IN A PERFECT ARC THAT ENDS AT THE FACE OF BARON TAGGE!



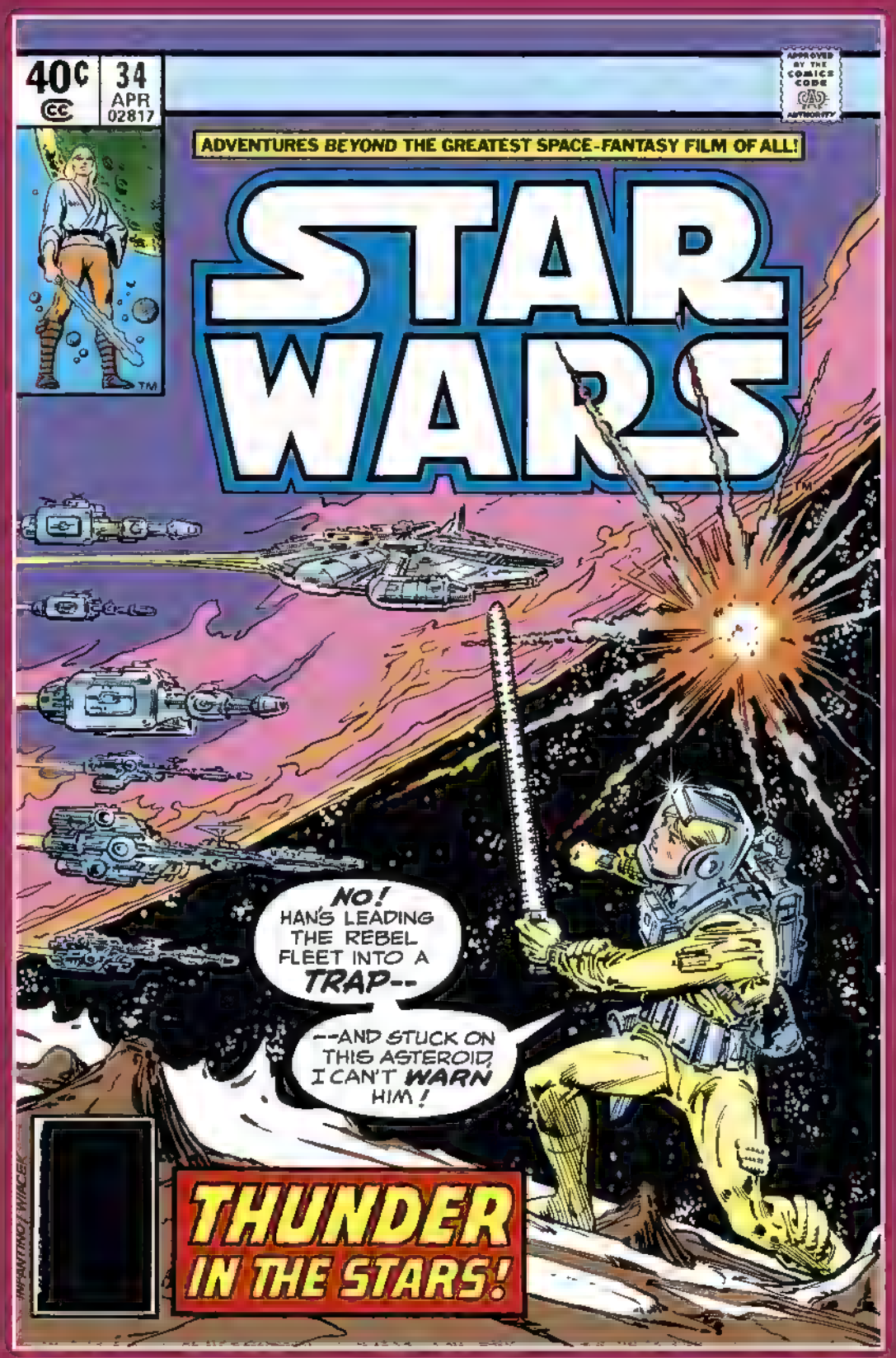
IT IS PILOTED BY A BOY WHO HAS LEARNED ONCE AGAIN HOW MUCH HE CAN DO WITH THE FORCE AWAKENED IN HIM BY OBI-WAN KENOBI...

...AND HAS ALSO DISCOVERED AT WHAT POINT HE PREFERS TO STOP.


...H-HE DIDN'T KILL ME...! DIDN'T... NEED TO...! CONTROLLED STROKE SO PERFECTLY... DESTROYED MY CYBER-VISION... WITHOUT HARMING ME...!
HE...WAS THAT GOOD...! TH-THAT... GOOD...!

THE BARON'S IN SICK BAY, SILAS... BEING TREATED FOR SHOCK. I'M ORDERING OUT A FLIGHT TO PURSUE THE REBEL SCUM--
IT'S UNNECESSARY, SHANKS. WHEN I LEARNED OF THE 'GAME' MY BROTHER PLANNED... I ORDERED SOME PRECAUTIONS TAKEN.
SKYWALKER'S SHIP HAS NO ARMAMENT, NO COMMUNICATIONS... AND JUST ENOUGH FUEL TO CARRY HIM TO DISASTER.
ORMAN IS THE ROMANTIC. I AM NOT.

NEXT ISSUE: THUNDER IN THE STARS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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
ADVENTURES BEYOND THE GREATEST SPACE-FANTASY FILM OF ALL!
STAR WARS
NO! HAN'S LEADING THE REBEL FLEET INTO A TRAP--
--AND STUCK ON THIS ASTEROID, I CAN'T WARN HIM!
THUNDER IN THE STARS!
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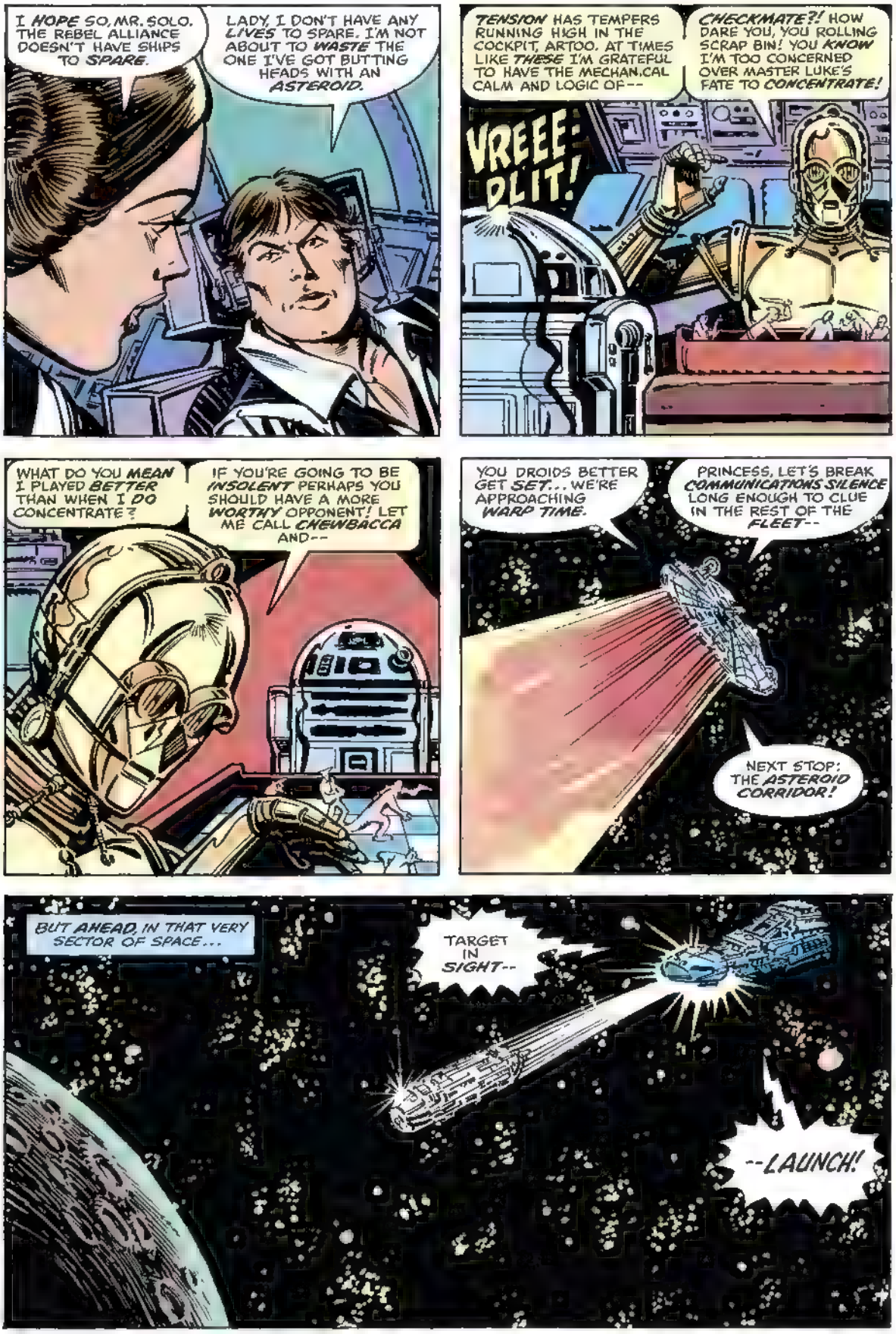
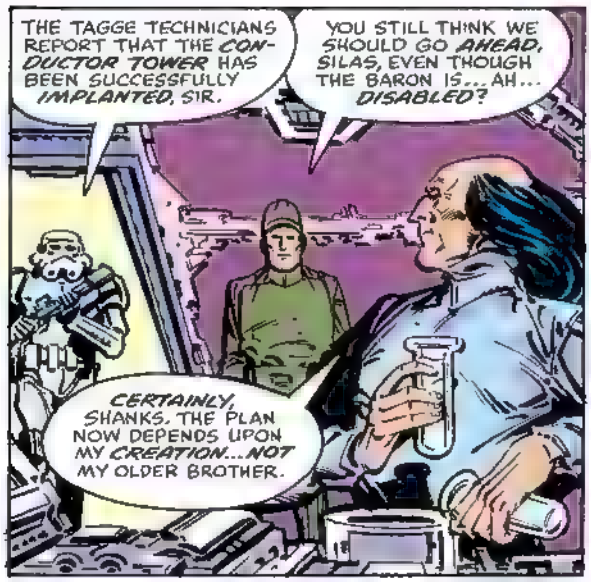
ARCHIE GOODWIN *WRITER / EDITOR* CARMINE INFANTINO & BOB WIACEK *ARTISTS* JOE ROSEN *LETTERER* PETRA GOLDBERG *COLORIST* JIM SHOOTER *CONSULTING EDITOR*

HAN SOLO, IS THIS THE BEST YOU CAN DO? I THOUGHT THIS SHIP WAS FAST!
A WORLD IS AT STAKE... ONE OF THE ALLIANCE'S PRIME SOURCES OF SUPPLIES!
AND LUKE SKYWALKER HAS HIS LIFE ON THE LINE! I UNDERSTAND ALL THAT, YOUR WORSHIPFULNESS--
BUT THIS IS A BIT TRICKIER THAN MY RUN OF THE MILL SPICE-SMUGGLING RAZZLE DAZZLE--
LF726

--I'M NOT USED TO PLAYING LEADER FOR A FLOCK OF REBEL WAR WAGONS!
BUT DON'T WORRY, PRINCESS. IF ANYONE CAN GET THEM THROUGH A CHANCY PASSAGE LIKE THE ASTEROID CORRIDOR... IT'S ME!

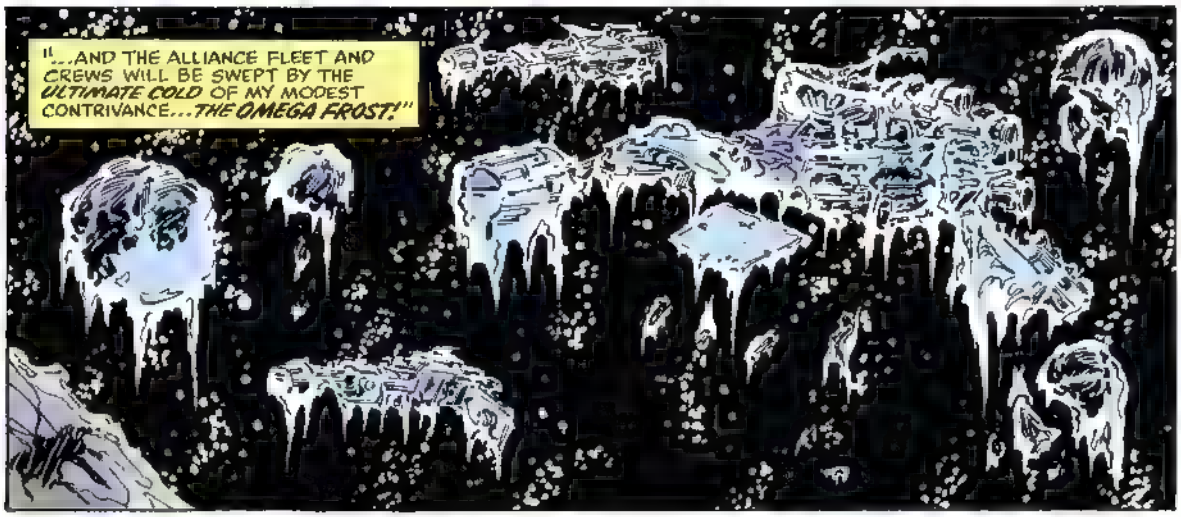
THUNDER IN THE STARS!

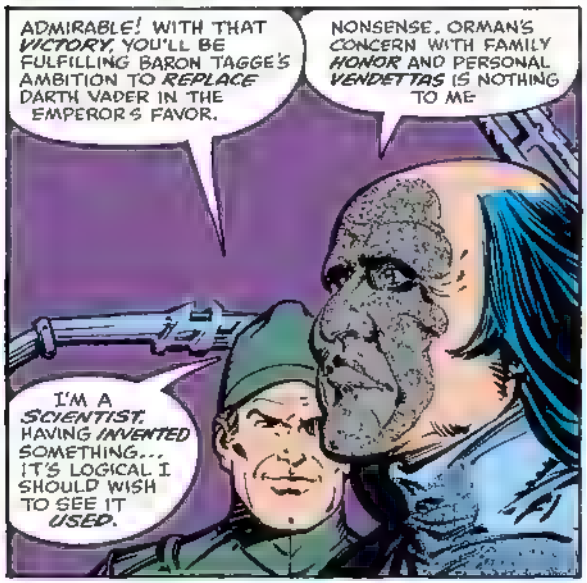

I HOPE SO, MR. SOLO. THE REBEL ALLIANCE DOESN'T HAVE SHIPS TO SPARE.
LADY, I DON'T HAVE ANY LIVES TO SPARE. I'M NOT ABOUT TO WASTE THE ONE I'VE GOT BUTTING HEADS WITH AN ASTEROID.
TENSION HAS TEMPERS RUNNING HIGH IN THE COCKPIT, ARTOO. AT TIMES LIKE THESE I'M GRATEFUL TO HAVE THE MECHANICAL CALM AND LOGIC OF--
CHECKMATE?! HOW DARE YOU, YOU ROLLING SCRAP BIN! YOU KNOW I'M TOO CONCERNED OVER MASTER LUKE'S FATE TO CONCENTRATE!
VREEE-DLIT!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN I PLAYED BETTER THAN WHEN I DO CONCENTRATE?
IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE INSOLENT PERHAPS YOU SHOULD HAVE A MORE WORTHY OPPONENT! LET ME CALL CHEWBACCA AND--
YOU DROIDS BETTER GET SET... WE'RE APPROACHING WARP TIME.
PRINCESS, LET'S BREAK COMMUNICATIONS SILENCE LONG ENOUGH TO CLUE IN THE REST OF THE FLEET--
NEXT STOP: THE ASTEROID CORRIDOR!
BUT AHEAD, IN THAT VERY SECTOR OF SPACE...
TARGET IN SIGHT--
--LAUNCH!

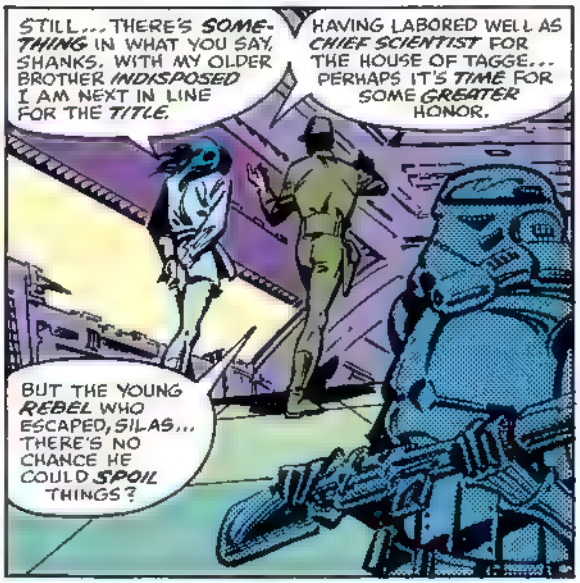

THE TAGGE TECHNICIANS REPORT THAT THE CONDUCTOR TOWER HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY IMPLANTED, SIR.
YOU STILL THINK WE SHOULD GO AHEAD, SILAS, EVEN THOUGH THE BARON IS... AH... DISABLED?
CERTAINLY, SHANKS. THE PLAN NOW DEPENDS UPON MY CREATION... NOT MY OLDER BROTHER.

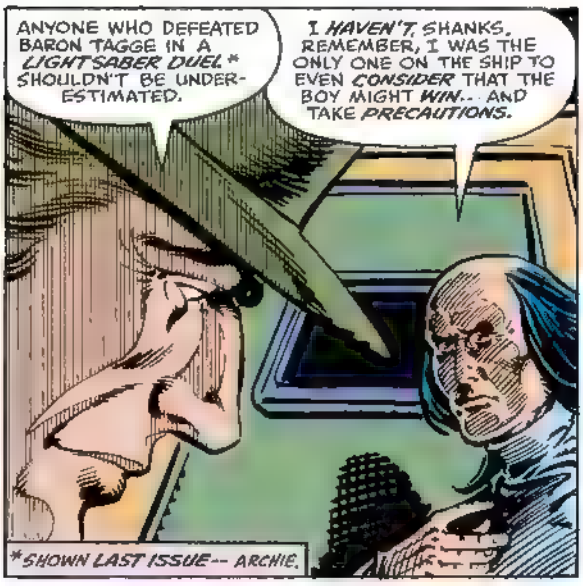
BELIEVING THEIR SUPPLY PLANET OF JUNCTION TO BE THE OBJECT OF OUR EVIL INTENTIONS... THE REBELS WILL SEND SHIPS TO STOP US.
DAREDEVILS THAT THEY ARE, THEY WILL USE THE TREACHEROUS ASTEROID CORRIDOR TO AVOID THE IMPERIAL BLOCKADE... KNOWING THE EMPIRE'S GREAT BULK CRUISERS CANNOT PATROL THERE.

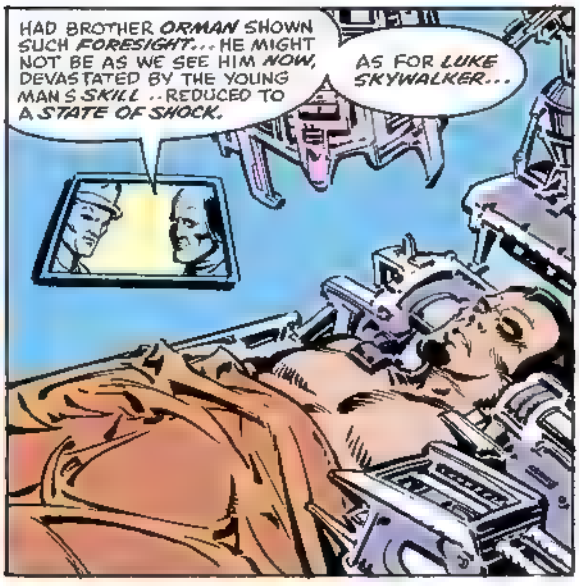
"UNFORTUNATELY FOR THEM, OUR CONDUCTOR TOWERS NOW BRACKET THE CORRIDOR. ONCE THEY ARE MIDWAY, I SHALL ACTIVATE THE TOWERS...



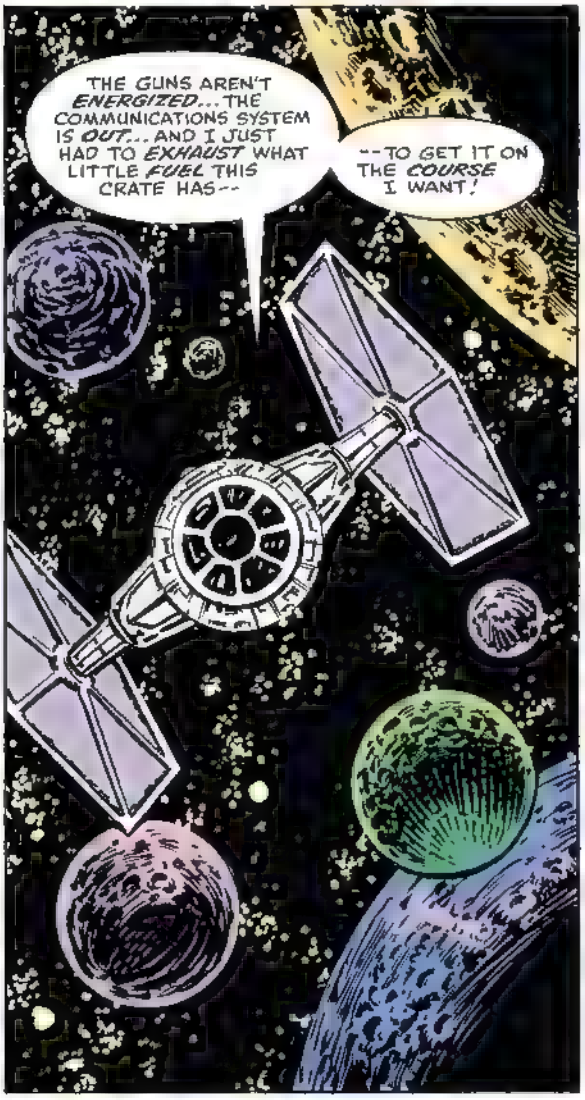

ADMIRABLE! WITH THAT VICTORY, YOU'LL BE FULFILLING BARON TAGGE'S AMBITION TO REPLACE DARTH VADER IN THE EMPEROR'S FAVOR.
NONSENSE. ORMAN'S CONCERN WITH FAMILY HONOR AND PERSONAL VENDETTAS IS NOTHING TO ME.
I'M A SCIENTIST. HAVING INVENTED SOMETHING... IT'S LOGICAL I SHOULD WISH TO SEE IT USED.

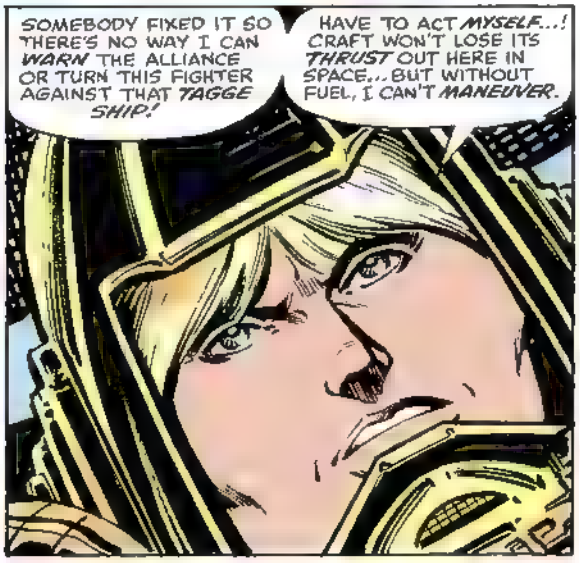

STILL... THERE'S SOMETHING IN WHAT YOU SAY, SHANKS. WITH MY OLDER BROTHER INDISPOSED I AM NEXT IN LINE FOR THE TITLE.
HAVING LABORED WELL AS CHIEF SCIENTIST FOR THE HOUSE OF TAGGE... PERHAPS IT'S TIME FOR SOME GREATER HONOR.
BUT THE YOUNG REBEL WHO ESCAPED, SILAS... THERE'S NO CHANCE HE COULD SPOIL THINGS?


ANYONE WHO DEFEATED BARON TAGGE IN A LIGHTSABER DUEL* SHOULDN'T BE UNDER-ESTIMATED.
I HAVEN'T, SHANKS. REMEMBER, I WAS THE ONLY ONE ON THE SHIP TO EVEN CONSIDER THAT THE BOY MIGHT WIN.. AND TAKE PRECAUTIONS.
*SHOWN LAST ISSUE-- ARCHIE.

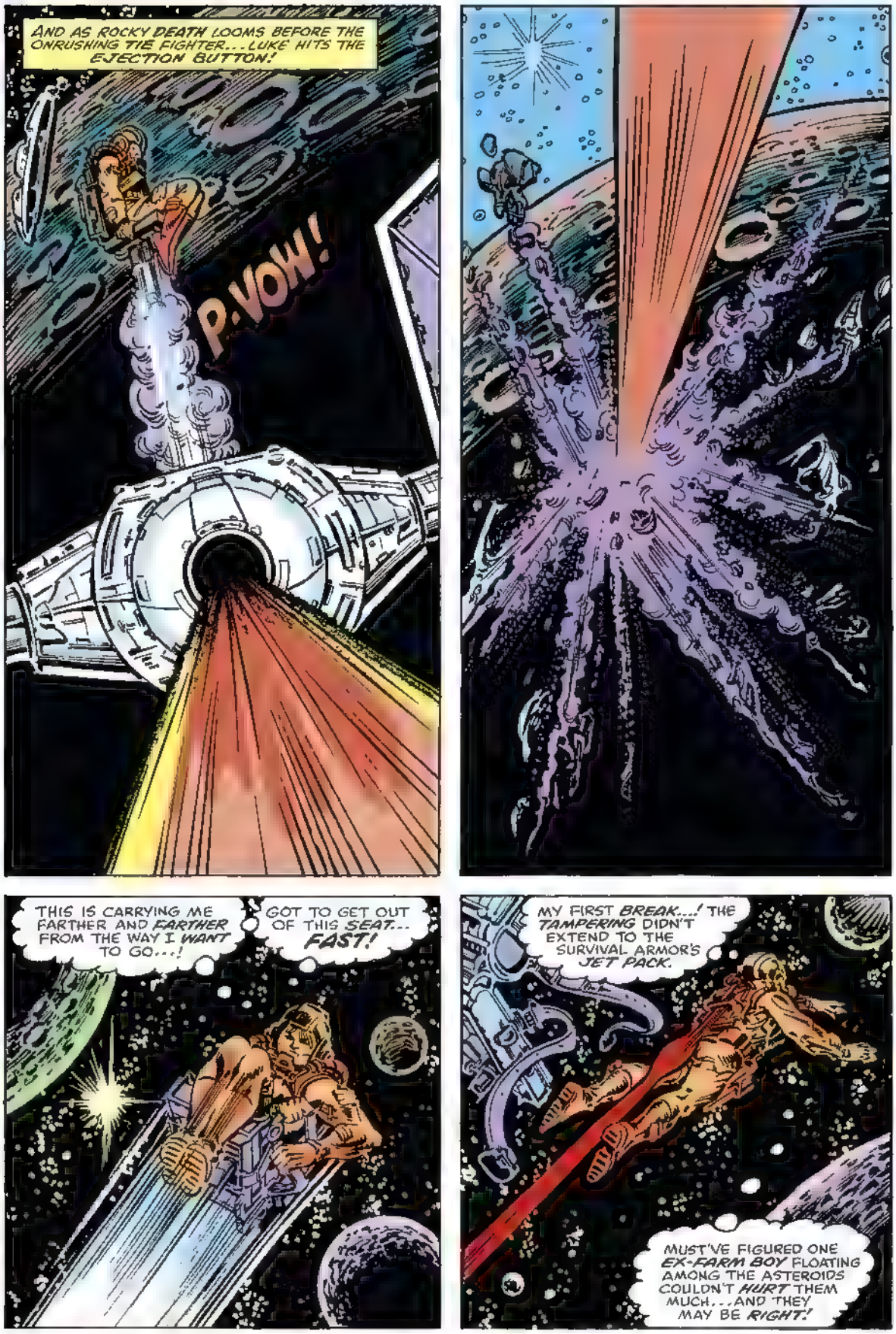

HAD BROTHER ORMAN SHOWN SUCH FORESIGHT... HE MIGHT NOT BE AS WE SEE HIM NOW, DEVASTATED BY THE YOUNG MAN'S SKILL .. REDUCED TO A STATE OF SHOCK.
AS FOR LUKE SKYWALKER...

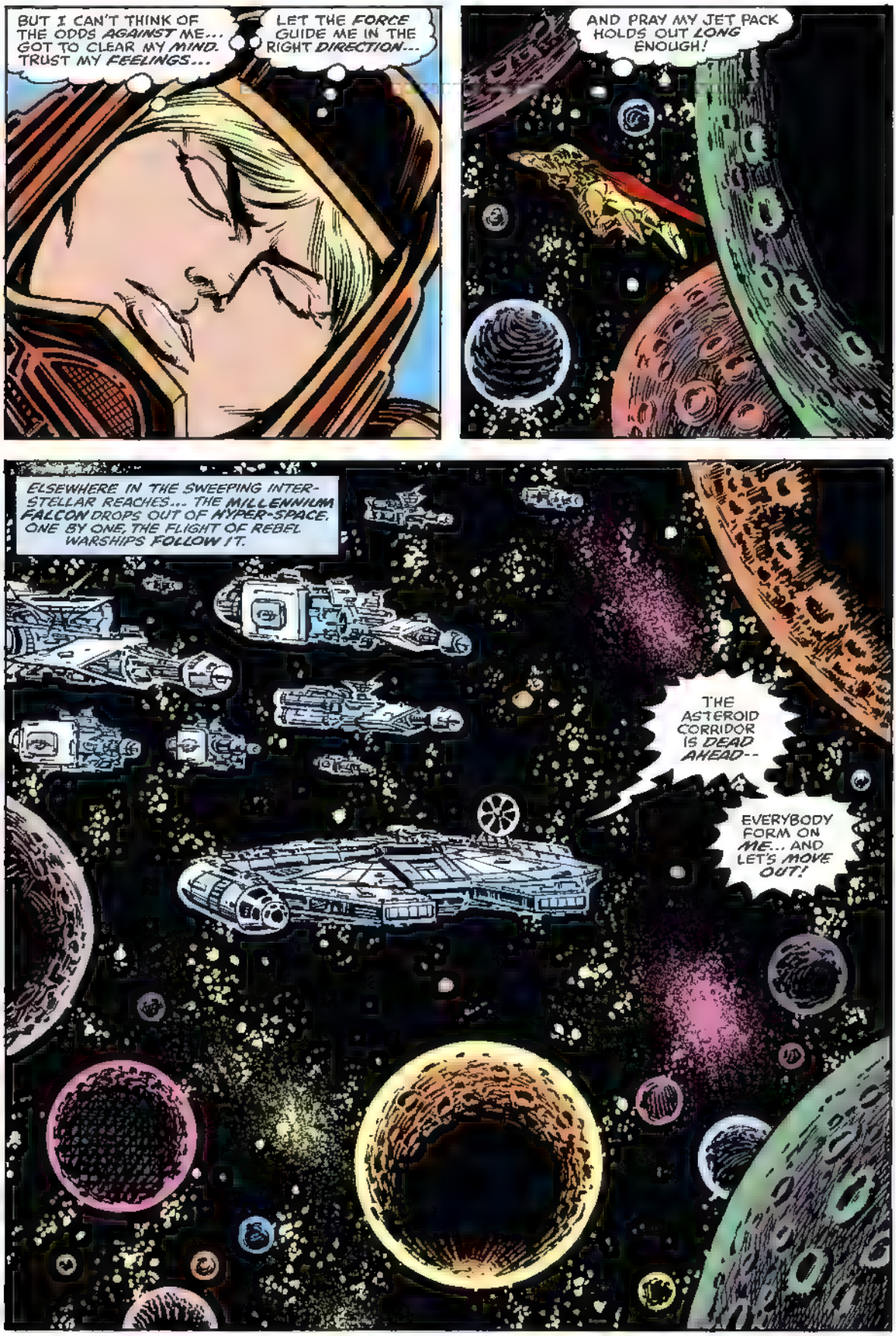
"...HE CAN'T BE ENJOYING HIS VICTORY. NOT SINCE HE'S UNDOUBTEDLY DISCOVERED THE ADJUSTMENTS I HAD MADE IN HIS ESCAPE CRAFT!"

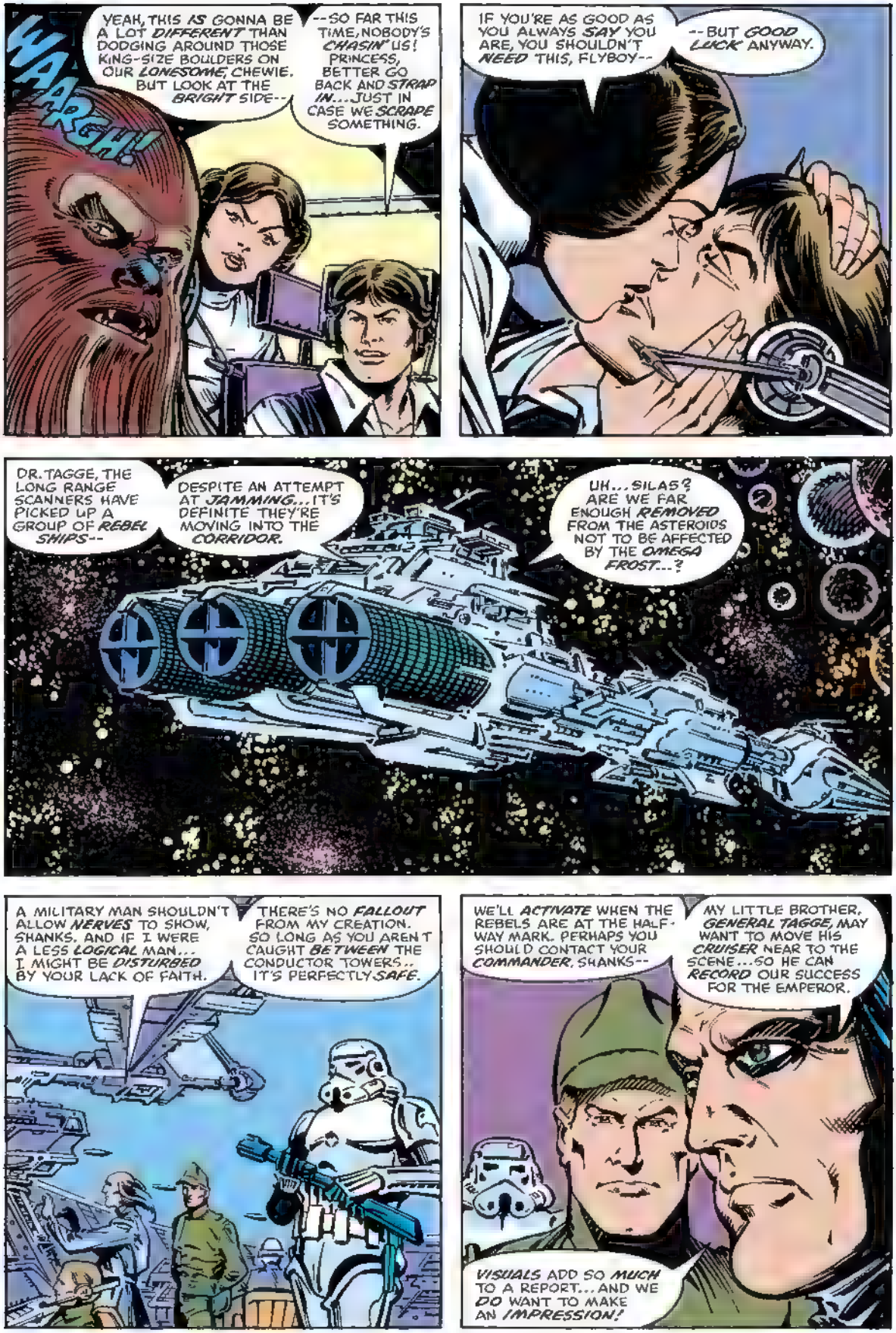

THE GUNS AREN'T ENERGIZED... THE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM IS OUT... AND I JUST HAD TO EXHAUST WHAT LITTLE FUEL THIS CRATE HAS--
--TO GET IT ON THE COURSE I WANT!

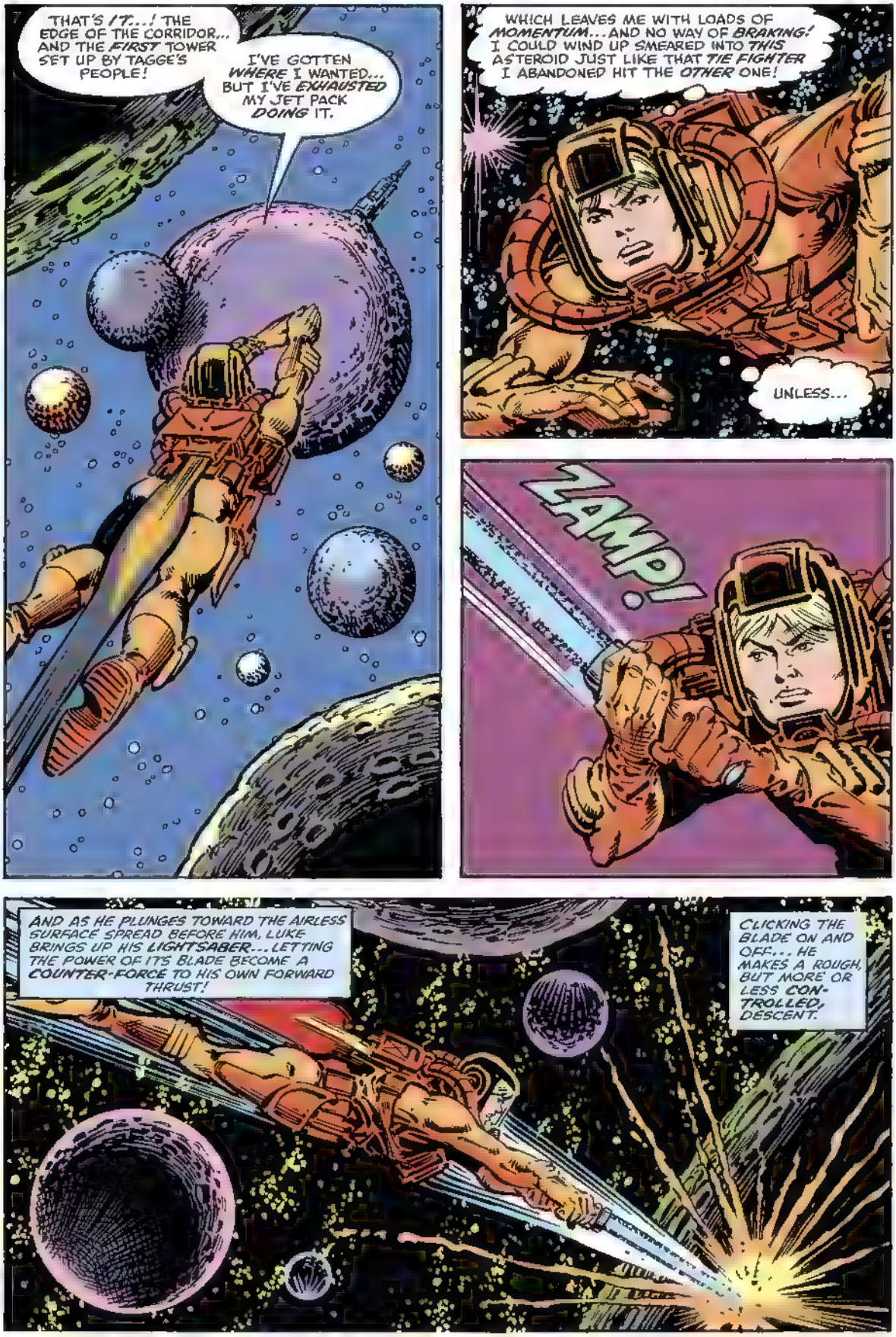

SOMEBODY FIXED IT SO THERE'S NO WAY I CAN WARN THE ALLIANCE OR TURN THIS FIGHTER AGAINST THAT TAGGE SHIP!
HAVE TO ACT MYSELF...! CRAFT WON'T LOSE ITS THRUST OUT HERE IN SPACE... BUT WITHOUT FUEL, I CAN'T MANEUVER.

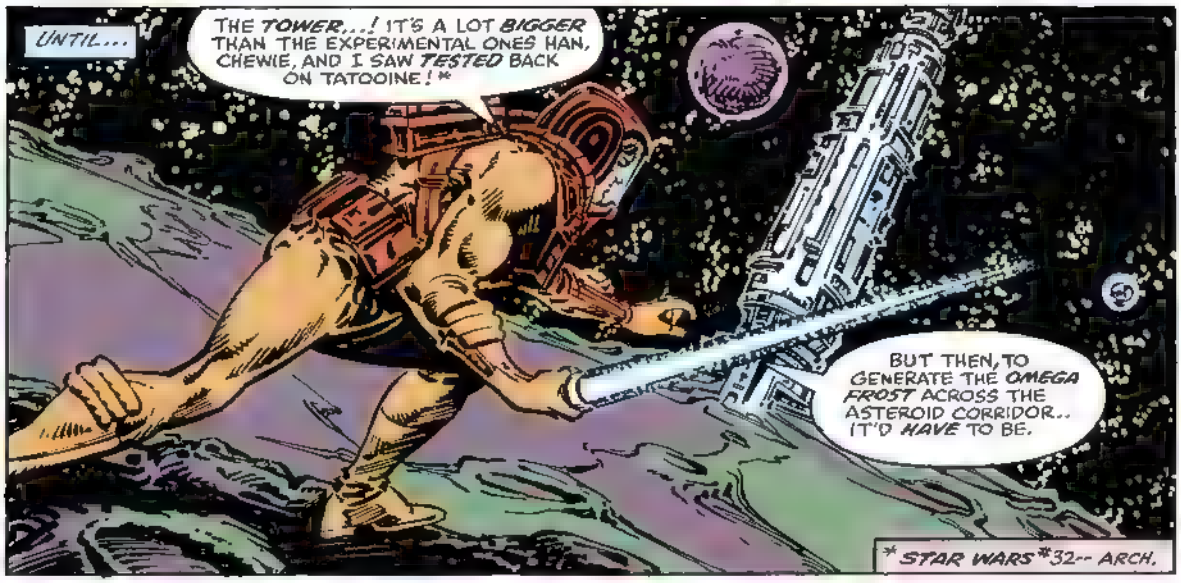
WHICH MAKES FLYING IT A GREAT WAY TO COMMIT SUICIDE...! 'CAUSE IN A PLACE LIKE THE ASTEROID CORRIDOR--
--SOMETHING'S BOUND TO GET IN THE WAY!

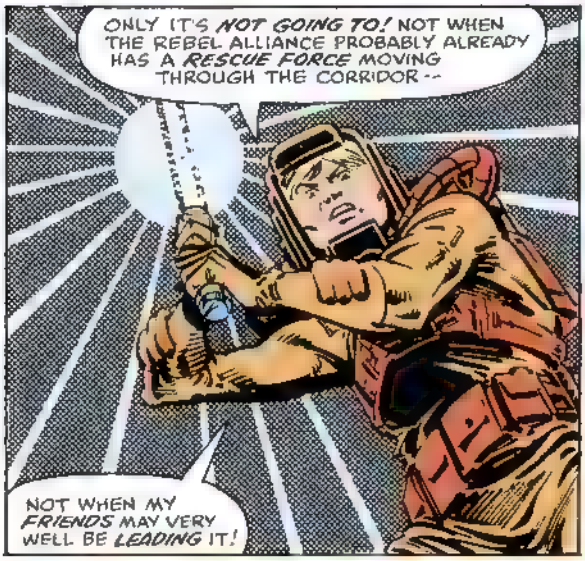

AND AS ROCKY DEATH LOOMS BEFORE THE ONRUSHING TIE FIGHTER... LUKE HITS THE EJECTION BUTTON!
P-VOW!
THIS IS CARRYING ME FARTHER AND FARTHER FROM THE WAY I WANT TO GO...!
GOT TO GET OUT OF THIS SEAT... FAST!
MY FIRST BREAK...! THE TAMPERING DIDN'T EXTEND TO THE SURVIVAL ARMOR'S JET PACK.
MUST'VE FIGURED ONE EX-FARM BOY FLOATING AMONG THE ASTEROIDS COULDN'T HURT THEM MUCH...AND THEY MAY BE RIGHT!

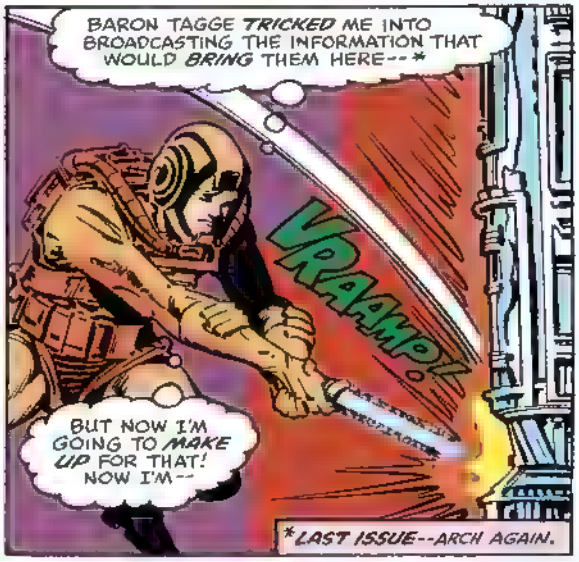

BUT I CAN'T THINK OF THE ODDS AGAINST ME... GOT TO CLEAR MY MIND. TRUST MY FEELINGS...
LET THE FORCE GUIDE ME IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION...
AND PRAY MY JET PACK HOLDS OUT LONG ENOUGH!
ELSEWHERE IN THE SWEEPING INTER-STELLAR REACHES... THE MILLENNIUM FALCON DROPS OUT OF HYPER-SPACE. ONE BY ONE, THE FLIGHT OF REBEL WARSHIPS FOLLOW IT.
THE ASTEROID CORRIDOR IS DEAD AHEAD--
EVERYBODY FORM ON ME... AND LET'S MOVE OUT!

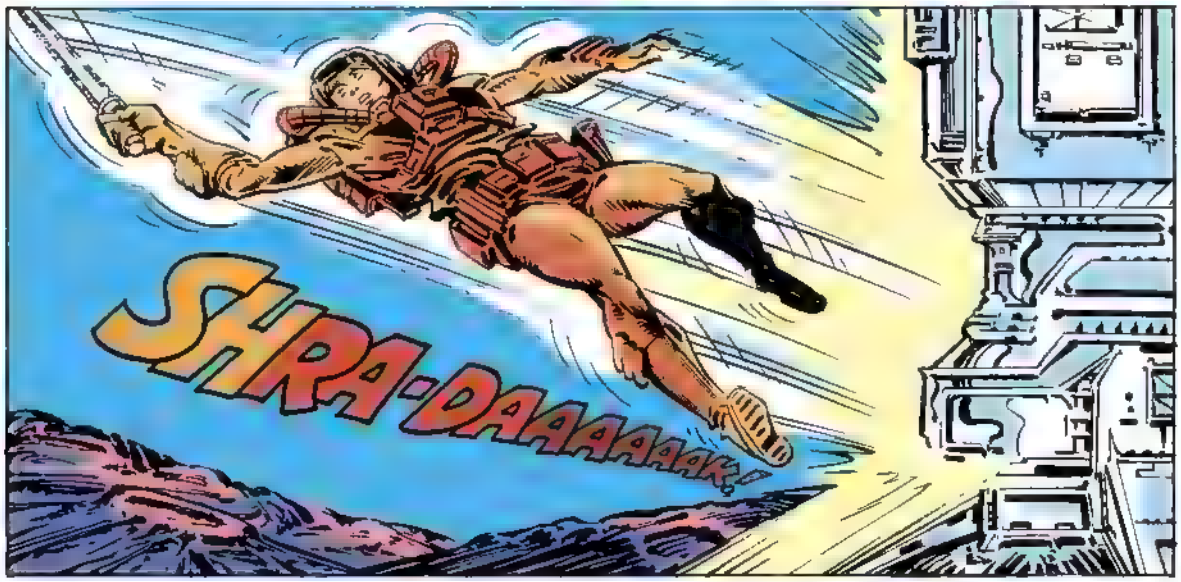

WAARGH!
YEAH, THIS AS GONNA BE A LOT DIFFERENT THAN DODGING AROUND THOSE KING-SIZE BOULDERS ON OUR LONESOME, CHEWIE. BUT LOOK AT THE BRIGHT SIDE--
--SO FAR THIS TIME, NOBODY'S CHASIN' US! PRINCESS, BETTER GO BACK AND STRAP IN... JUST IN CASE WE SCRAPE SOMETHING.
IF YOU'RE AS GOOD AS YOU ALWAYS SAY YOU ARE, YOU SHOULDN'T NEED THIS, FLYBOY--
--BUT GOOD LUCK ANYWAY.
DR. TAGGE, THE LONG RANGE SCANNERS HAVE PICKED UP A GROUP OF REBEL SHIPS--
DESPITE AN ATTEMPT AT JAMMING... IT'S DEFINITE THEY'RE MOVING INTO THE CORRIDOR.
UH... SILAS? ARE WE FAR ENOUGH REMOVED FROM THE ASTEROIDS NOT TO BE AFFECTED BY THE OMEGA FROST...?
A MILITARY MAN SHOULDN'T ALLOW NERVES TO SHOW, SHANKS. AND IF I WERE A LESS LOGICAL MAN... I MIGHT BE DISTURBED BY YOUR LACK OF FAITH.
THERE'S NO FALLOUT FROM MY CREATION. SO LONG AS YOU AREN'T CAUGHT BETWEEN THE CONDUCTOR TOWERS... IT'S PERFECTLY SAFE.
WE'LL ACTIVATE WHEN THE REBELS ARE AT THE HALF-WAY MARK. PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CONTACT YOUR COMMANDER, SHANKS--
MY LITTLE BROTHER, GENERAL TAGGE, MAY WANT TO MOVE HIS CRUISER NEAR TO THE SCENE... SO HE CAN RECORD OUR SUCCESS FOR THE EMPEROR.
VISUALS ADD SO MUCH TO A REPORT... AND WE DO WANT TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION!

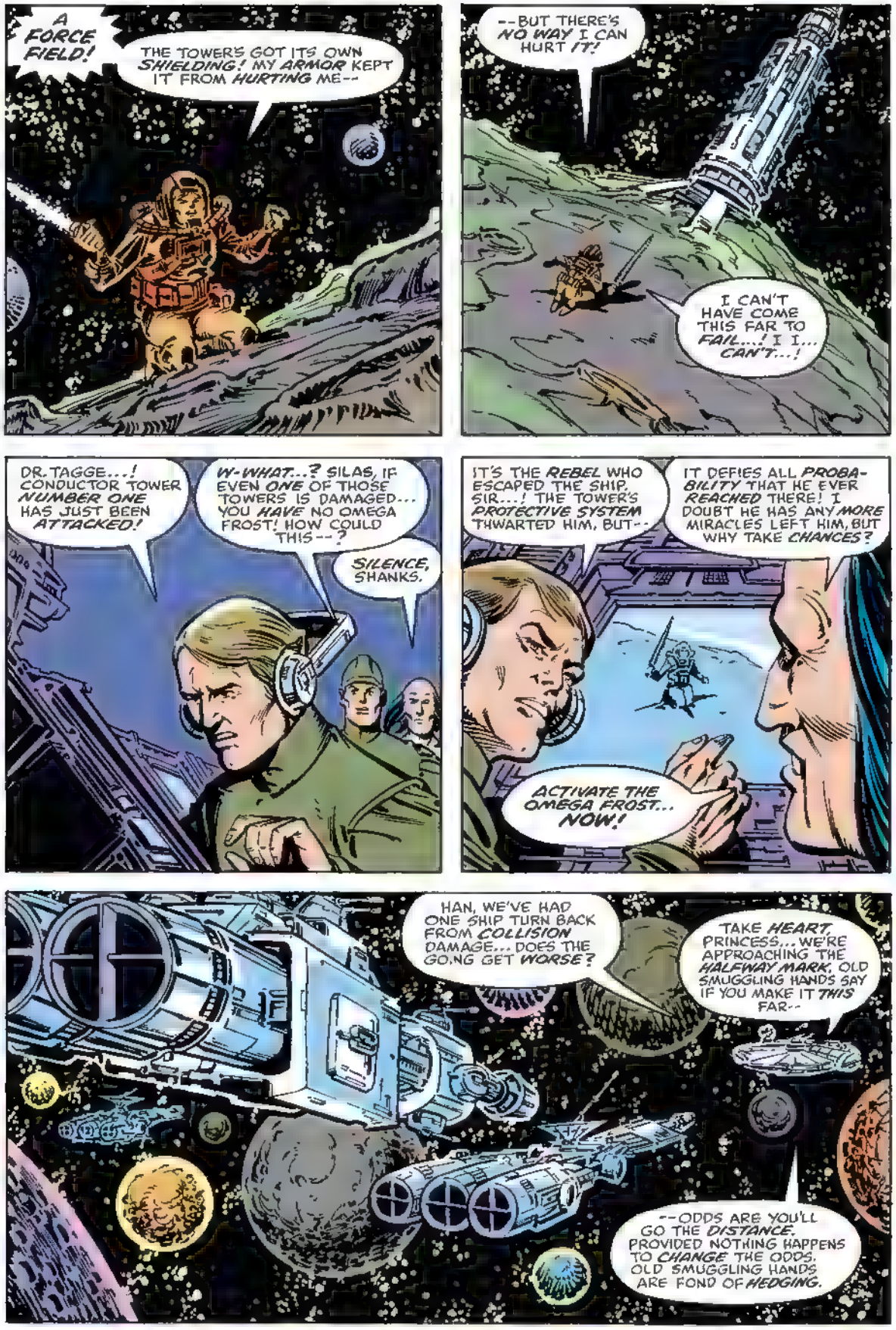

THAT'S IT...! THE EDGE OF THE CORRIDOR... AND THE FIRST TOWER SET UP BY TAGGE'S PEOPLE!
I'VE GOTTEN WHERE I WANTED... BUT I'VE EXHAUSTED MY JET PACK DOING IT.
WHICH LEAVES ME WITH LOADS OF MOMENTUM... AND NO WAY OF BRAKING! I COULD WIND UP SMEARED INTO THIS ASTEROID JUST LIKE THAT TIE FIGHTER I ABANDONED HIT THE OTHER ONE!
UNLESS...
ZAMP!
AND AS HE PLUNGES TOWARD THE AIRLESS SURFACE SPREAD BEFORE HIM, LUKE BRINGS UP HIS LIGHTSABER... LETTING THE POWER OF IT'S BLADE BECOME A COUNTER-FORCE TO HIS OWN FORWARD THRUST!
CLICKING THE BLADE ON AND OFF... HE MAKES A ROUGH, BUT MORE OR LESS CONTROLLED, DESCENT.

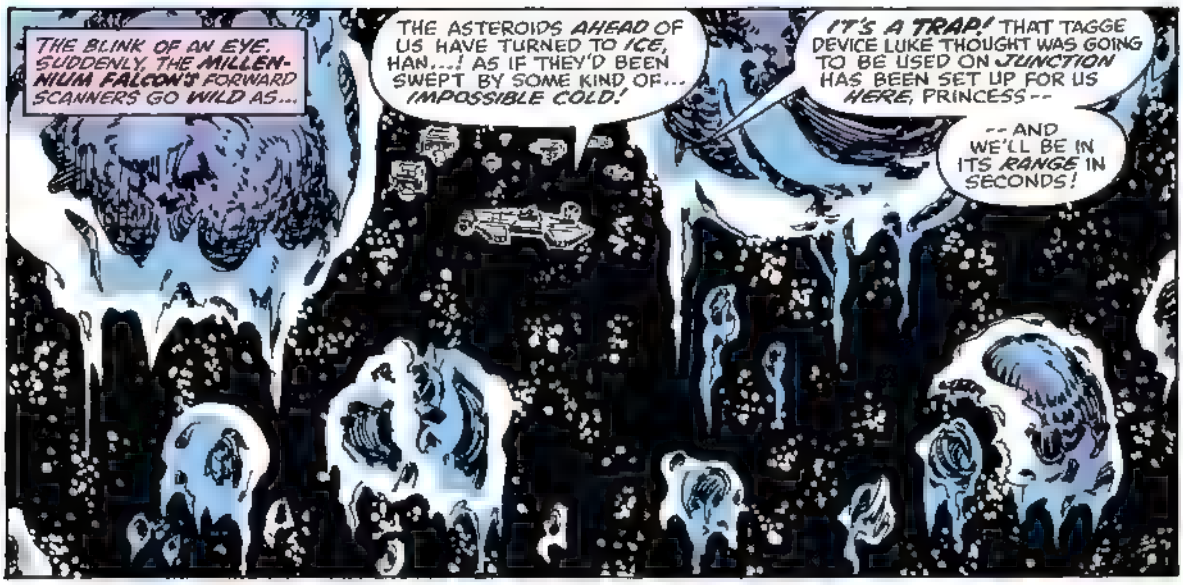

UNTIL...
THE TOWER...! IT'S A LOT BIGGER THAN THE EXPERIMENTAL ONES HAN, CHEWIE, AND I SAW TESTED BACK ON TATOOINE! *
BUT THEN, TO GENERATE THE OMEGA FROST ACROSS THE ASTEROID CORRIDOR.. IT'D HAVE TO BE.
* STAR WARS *32-- ARCH.


ONLY IT'S NOT GOING TO! NOT WHEN THE REBEL ALLIANCE PROBABLY ALREADY HAS A RESCUE FORCE MOVING THROUGH THE CORRIDOR --
NOT WHEN MY FRIENDS MAY VERY WELL BE LEADING IT!

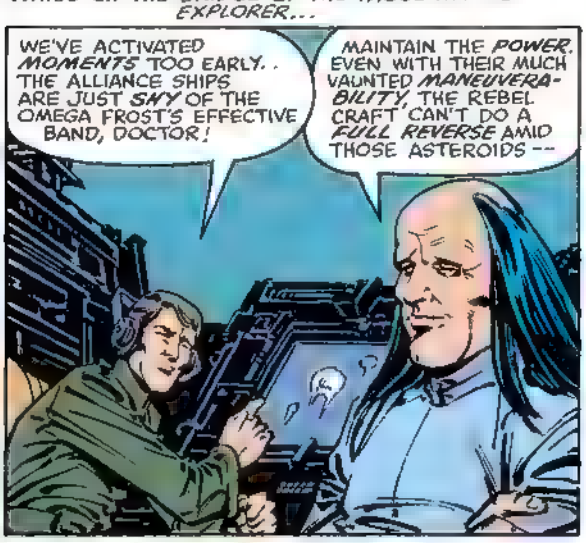

BARON TAGGE TRICKED ME INTO BROADCASTING THE INFORMATION THAT WOULD BRING THEM HERE-- *
VRAAMP!
BUT NOW I'M GOING TO MAKE UP FOR THAT! NOW I'M--
*LAST ISSUE--ARCH AGAIN.


SHRA-DAAAAAAK!


A FORCE FIELD!
THE TOWER'S GOT ITS OWN SHIELDING! MY ARMOR KEPT IT FROM HURTING ME--
--BUT THERE'S NO WAY I CAN HURT IT!
I CAN'T HAVE COME THIS FAR TO FAIL...! I I... CAN'T...!
DR. TAGGE...! CONDUCTOR TOWER NUMBER ONE HAS JUST BEEN ATTACKED!
W-WHAT...? SILAS, IF EVEN ONE OF THOSE TOWERS IS DAMAGED... YOU HAVE NO OMEGA FROST! HOW COULD THIS--?
SILENCE, SHANKS.
IT'S THE REBEL WHO ESCAPED THE SHIP, SIR...! THE TOWER'S PROTECTIVE SYSTEM THWARTED HIM, BUT--
IT DEFIES ALL PROBABILITY THAT HE EVER REACHED THERE! I DOUBT HE HAS ANY MORE MIRACLES LEFT HIM, BUT WHY TAKE CHANCES?
ACTIVATE THE OMEGA FROST... NOW!
HAN, WE'VE HAD ONE SHIP TURN BACK FROM COLLISION DAMAGE... DOES THE GONG GET WORSE?
TAKE HEART, PRINCESS... WE'RE APPROACHING THE HALFWAY MARK. OLD SMUGGLING HANDS SAY IF YOU MAKE IT THIS FAR--
--ODDS ARE YOU'LL GO THE DISTANCE, PROVIDED NOTHING HAPPENS TO CHANGE THE ODDS. OLD SMUGGLING HANDS ARE FOND OF HEDGING.

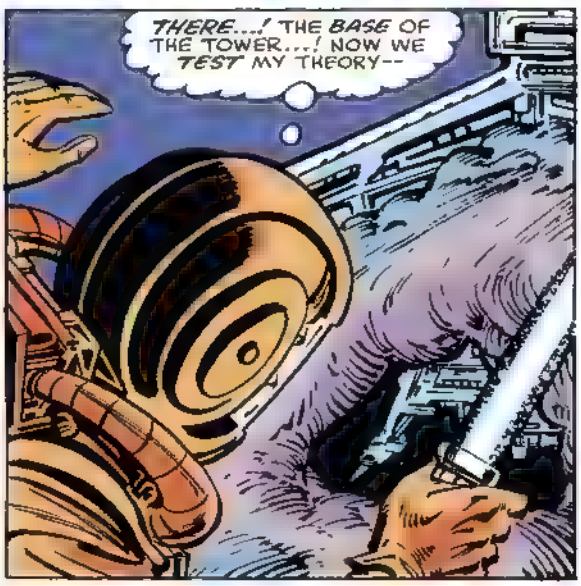

THE BLINK OF AN EYE. SUDDENLY, THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S FORWARD SCANNERS GO WILD AS...
THE ASTEROIDS AHEAD OF US HAVE TURNED TO ICE, HAN...! AS IF THEY'D BEEN SWEPT BY SOME KIND OF... IMPOSSIBLE COLD!
IT'S A TRAP! THAT TAGGE DEVICE LUKE THOUGHT WAS GOING TO BE USED ON JUNCTION HAS BEEN SET UP FOR US HERE, PRINCESS--
--AND WE'LL BE IN ITS RANGE IN SECONDS!

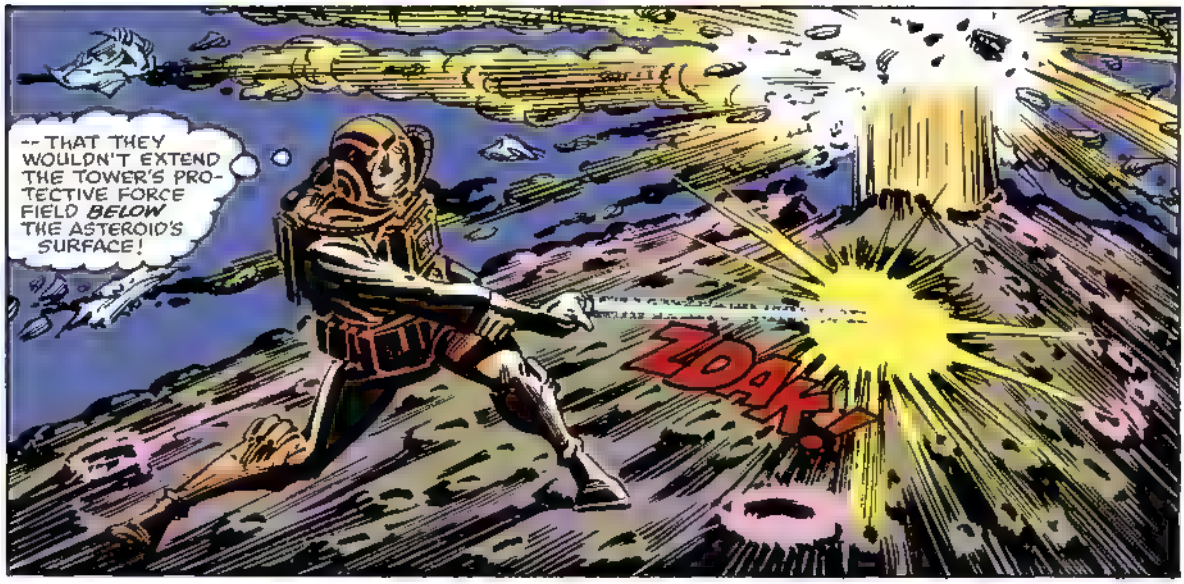
WHILE ON THE BRIDGE OF THE TAGGE MINING EXPLORER...

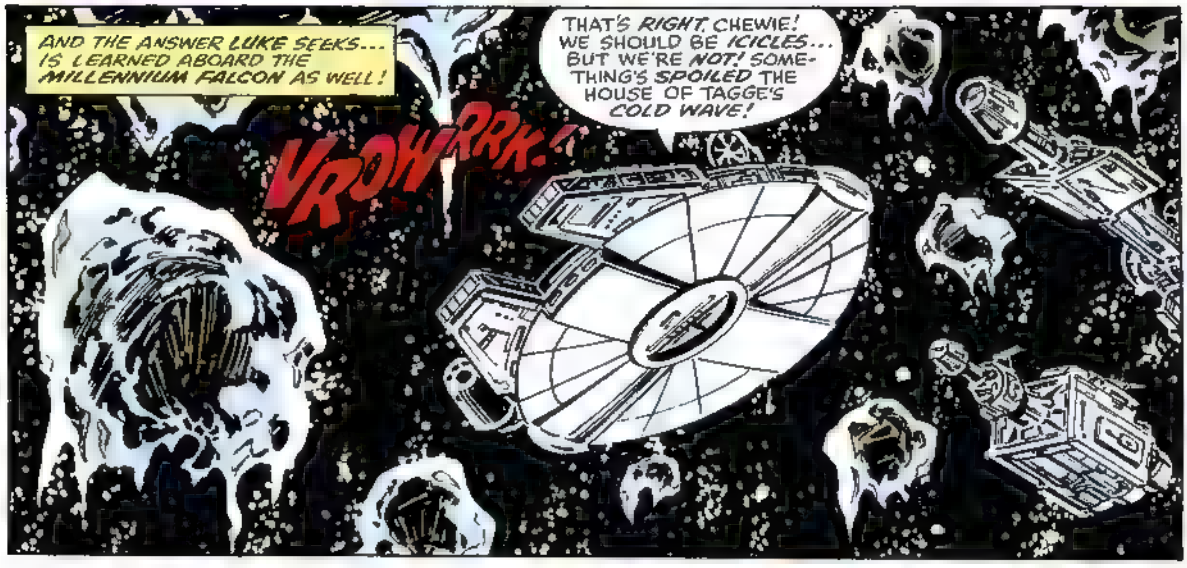

WE'VE ACTIVATED MOMENTS TOO EARLY.. THE ALLIANCE SHIPS ARE JUST SHY OF THE OMEGA FROST'S EFFECTIVE BAND, DOCTOR!
MAINTAIN THE POWER. EVEN WITH THEIR MUCH VAUNTED MANEUVERABILITY, THE REBEL CRAFT CAN'T DO A FULL REVERSE AMID THOSE ASTEROIDS --

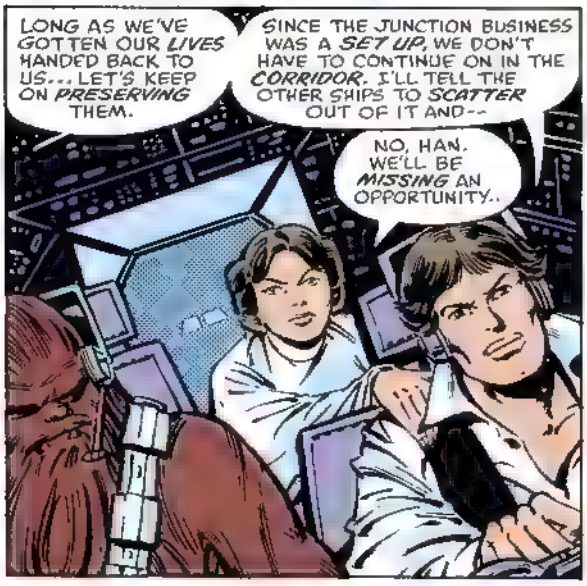
--NOT WITHOUT COLLISION AND DISASTER. EITHER WAY, WE WIN.
YOU SEE THE VALUE OF THE SCIENTIFIC MIND, SHANKS? I'VE CONSIDERED ALL CONTINGENCIES SO--
YOU'VE FORGOT TEN SKYWALKER! LOOK AT THE MONITOR... HE HASN'T GIVEN UP!

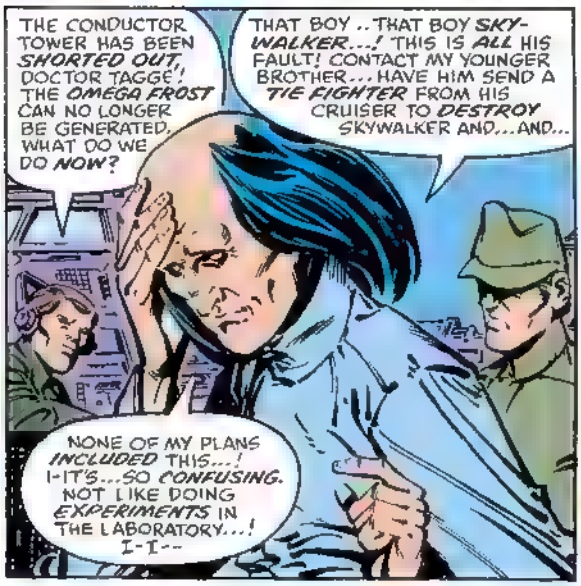
IT IS HIS LAST CHANCE. HIS ARMOR'S AIR RESERVES ARE NEARLY SPENT. EACH DRIVING SWING OF THE LIGHTSABER IS TORTUROUS EFFORT...

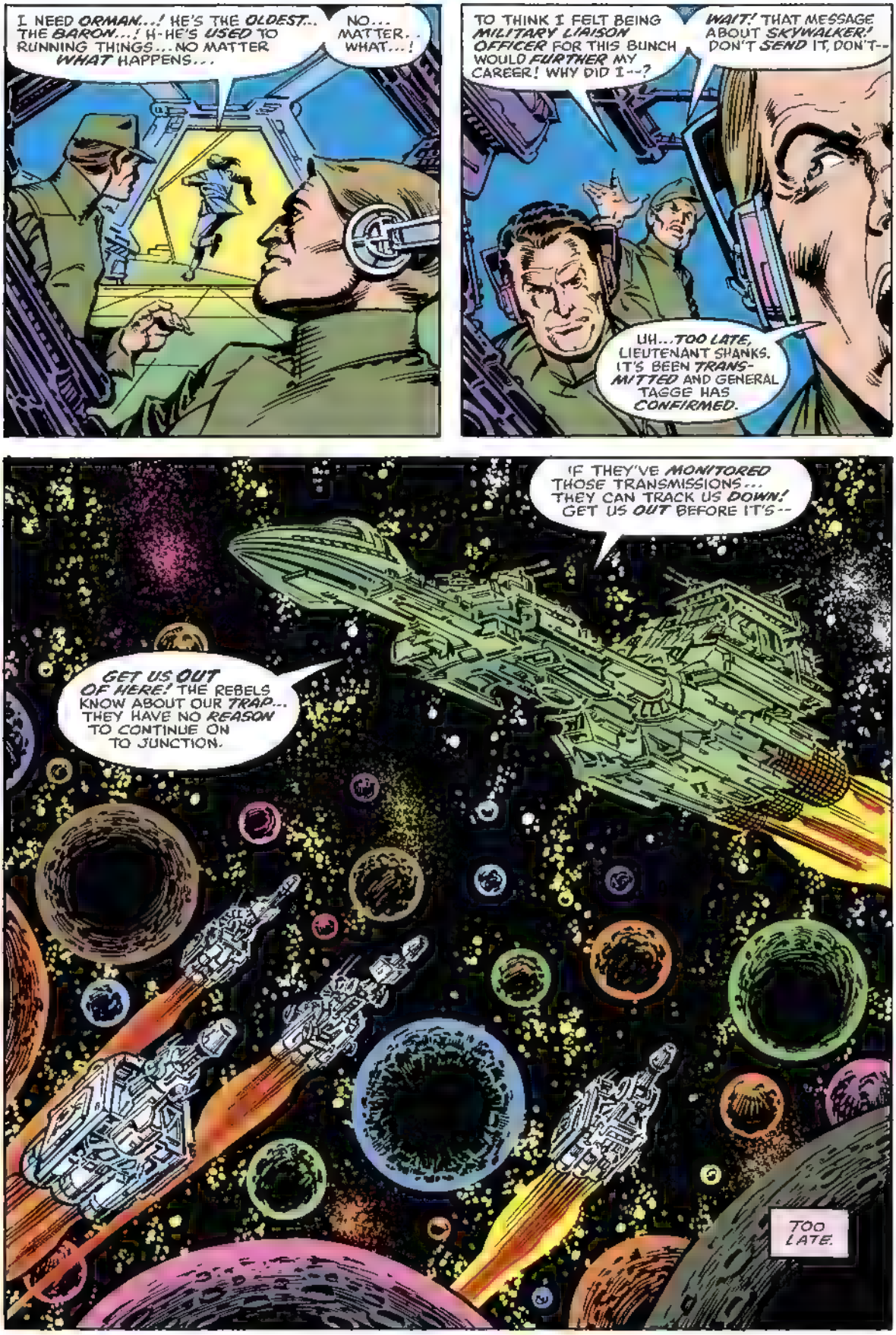


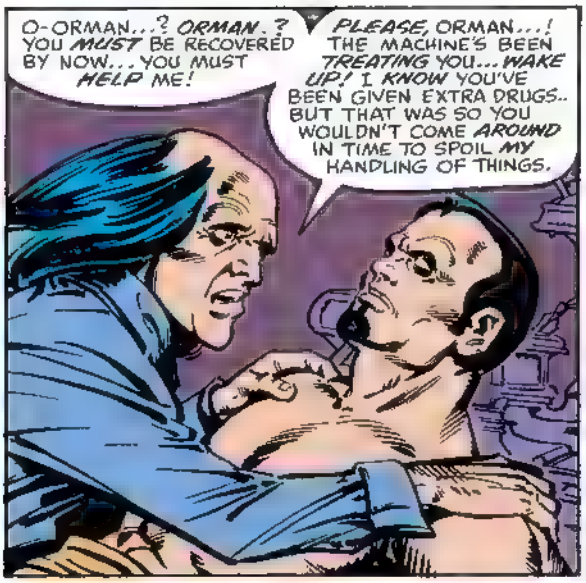

--THAT THEY WOULDN'T EXTEND THE TOWER'S PROTECTIVE FORCE FIELD *BELOW* THE ASTEROID'S SURFACE!
ZOAK!


AND THE ANSWER LUKE SEEKS... IS LEARNED ABOARD THE *MILLENNIUM FALCON* AS WELL!
THAT'S *RIGHT*, CHEWIE! WE SHOULD BE *ICICLES*... BUT WE'RE *NOT*! SOMETHING'S *SPOILED* THE HOUSE OF TAGGE'S *COLD WAVE*!
VROWRRK!

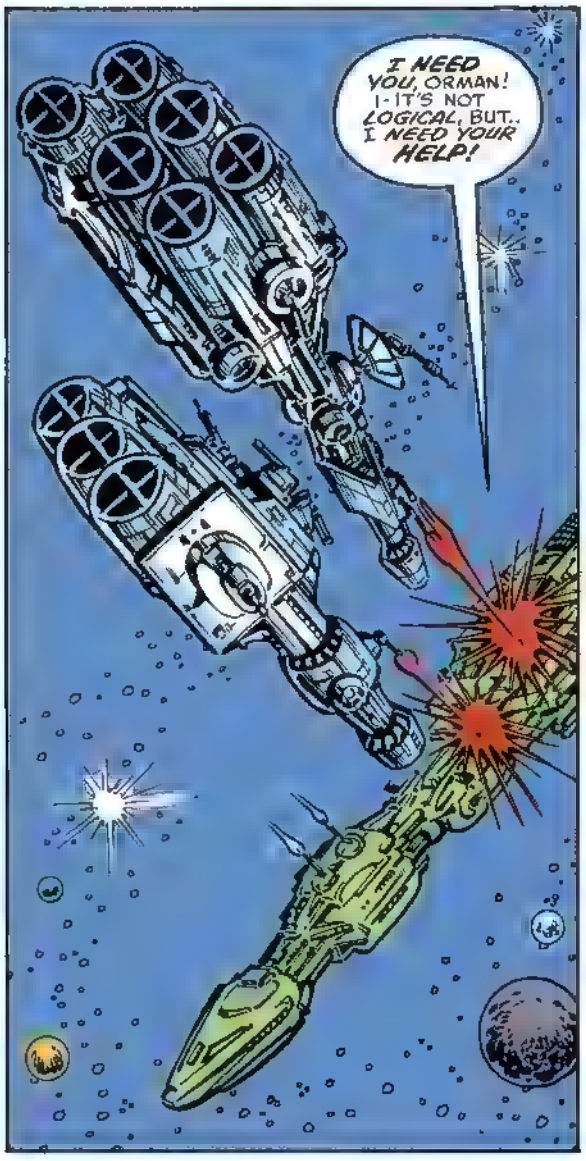

LONG AS WE'VE GOTTEN OUR *LIVES* HANDED BACK TO US... LET'S KEEP ON *PRESERVING* THEM.
SINCE THE JUNCTION BUSINESS WAS A *SET UP*, WE DON'T HAVE TO CONTINUE ON IN THE *CORRIDOR*. I'LL TELL THE OTHER SHIPS TO *SCATTER* OUT OF IT AND--
NO, HAN. WE'LL BE *MISSING* AN OPPORTUNITY..

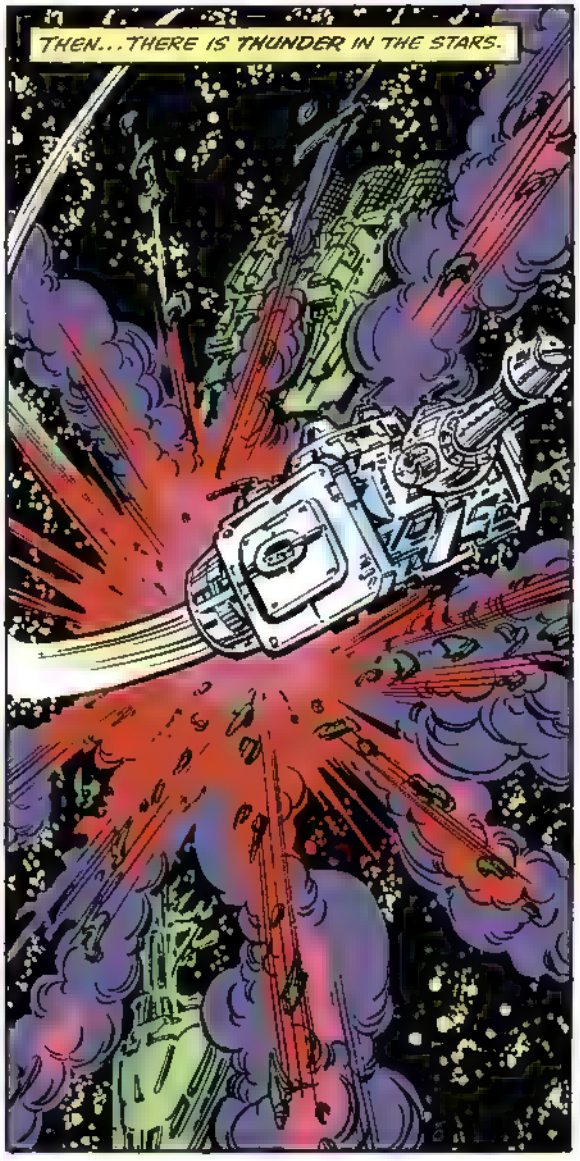

THE CONDUCTOR TOWER HAS BEEN *SHORTED OUT*, DOCTOR TAGGE! THE *OMEGA FROST* CAN NO LONGER BE GENERATED. WHAT DO WE DO *NOW*?
THAT BOY .. THAT BOY *SKYWALKER*...! THIS IS *ALL* HIS FAULT! CONTACT MY YOUNGER BROTHER... HAVE HIM SEND A *TIE FIGHTER* FROM HIS CRUISER TO *DESTROY* SKYWALKER AND... AND...
NONE OF MY PLANS *INCLUDED* THIS...! I-IT'S... SO *CONFUSING*. NOT LIKE DOING *EXPERIMENTS* IN THE LABORATORY...! I-I--

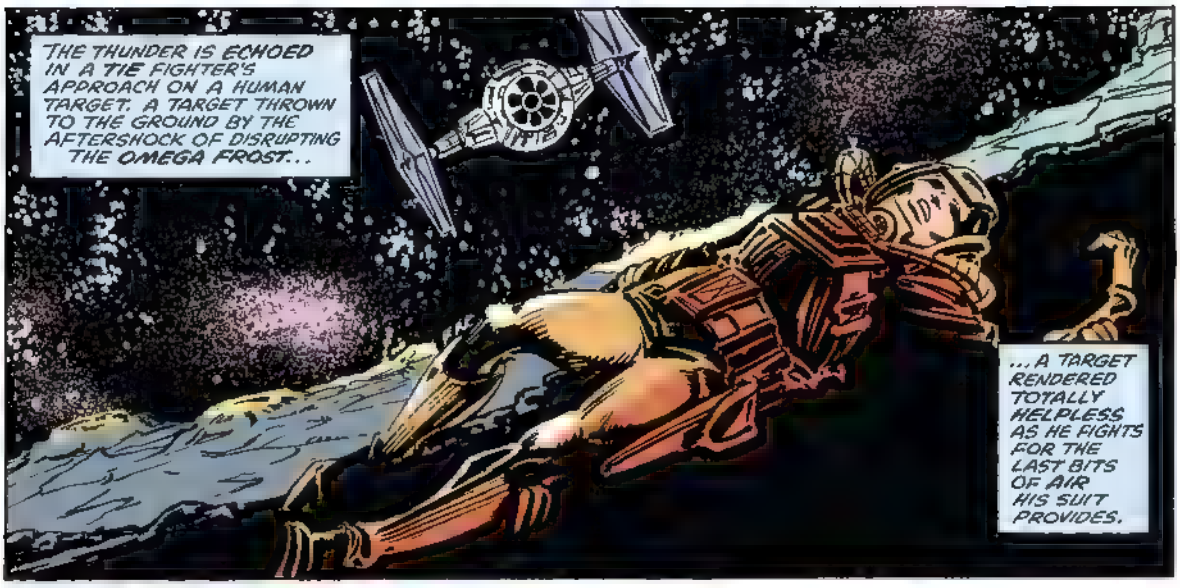

I NEED ORMAN...! HE'S THE OLDEST.. THE BARON...! H-HE'S USED TO RUNNING THINGS...NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS...
NO... MATTER.. WHAT...!
TO THINK I FELT BEING MILITARY LIAISON OFFICER FOR THIS BUNCH WOULD FURTHER MY CAREER! WHY DID I--?
WAIT! THAT MESSAGE ABOUT SKYWALKER! DON'T SEND IT, DON'T--
UH...TOO LATE, LIEUTENANT SHANKS. IT'S BEEN TRANS-MITTED AND GENERAL TAGGE HAS CONFIRMED.
IF THEY'VE MONITORED THOSE TRANSMISSIONS... THEY CAN TRACK US DOWN! GET US OUT BEFORE IT'S--
GET US OUT OF HERE! THE REBELS KNOW ABOUT OUR TRAP... THEY HAVE NO REASON TO CONTINUE ON TO JUNCTION.
TOO LATE.

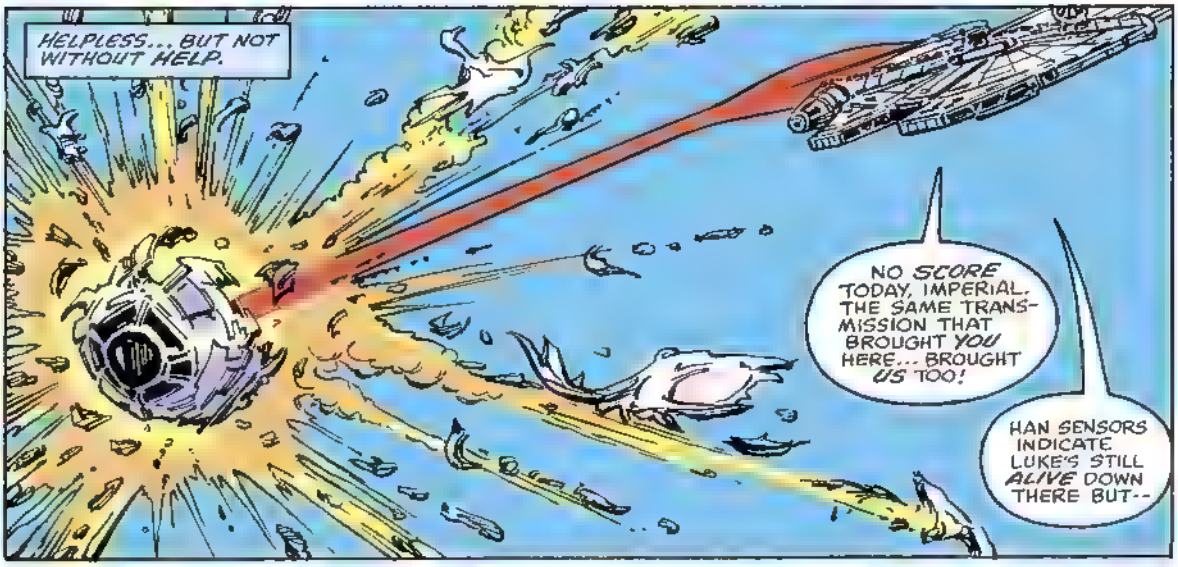

O-ORMAN...? ORMAN.? YOU MUST BE RECOVERED BY NOW... YOU MUST HELP ME!
PLEASE, ORMAN...! THE MACHINE'S BEEN TREATING YOU... WAKE UP! I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN EXTRA DRUGS.. BUT THAT WAS SO YOU WOULDN'T COME AROUND IN TIME TO SPOIL MY HANDLING OF THINGS.

B-BUT IT'S ALL GONE DREADFULLY WRONG...! THE OMEGA FROST WAS STOPPED... THE REBELS ARE ON THE LOOSE...! I NEED YOU, ORMAN ..!
W-WHAT... ARE YOU... SAYING, SILAS.. ?


I NEED YOU, ORMAN! I-IT'S NOT LOGICAL, BUT.. I NEED YOUR HELP!


THEN... THERE IS THUNDER IN THE STARS.


THE THUNDER IS ECHOED IN A TIE FIGHTER'S APPROACH ON A HUMAN TARGET. A TARGET THROWN TO THE GROUND BY THE AFTERSHOCK OF DISRUPTING THE OMEGA FROST...
...A TARGET RENDERED TOTALLY HELPLESS AS HE FIGHTS FOR THE LAST BITS OF AIR HIS SUIT PROVIDES.


HELPLESS... BUT NOT WITHOUT HELP.
NO SCORE TODAY, IMPERIAL. THE SAME TRANSMISSION THAT BROUGHT YOU HERE... BROUGHT US TOO!
HAN SENSORS INDICATE LUKE'S STILL ALIVE DOWN THERE BUT--

UNFURROW YOUR BROW, PRINCESS... I'VE NEVER MISSED A LAST MINUTE RESCUE YET. CHEWIE WILL TAKE OVER WHILE I PICK UP THE KID.
DESPITE MY CYNICAL SOUL, EVEN I ENJOY AN OCCASIONAL HAPPY ENDING.

NEXT ISSUE: **DARK LORD'S GAMBIT!**

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ADVENTURES BEYOND THE GREATEST SPACE-FANTASY FILM OF ALL!
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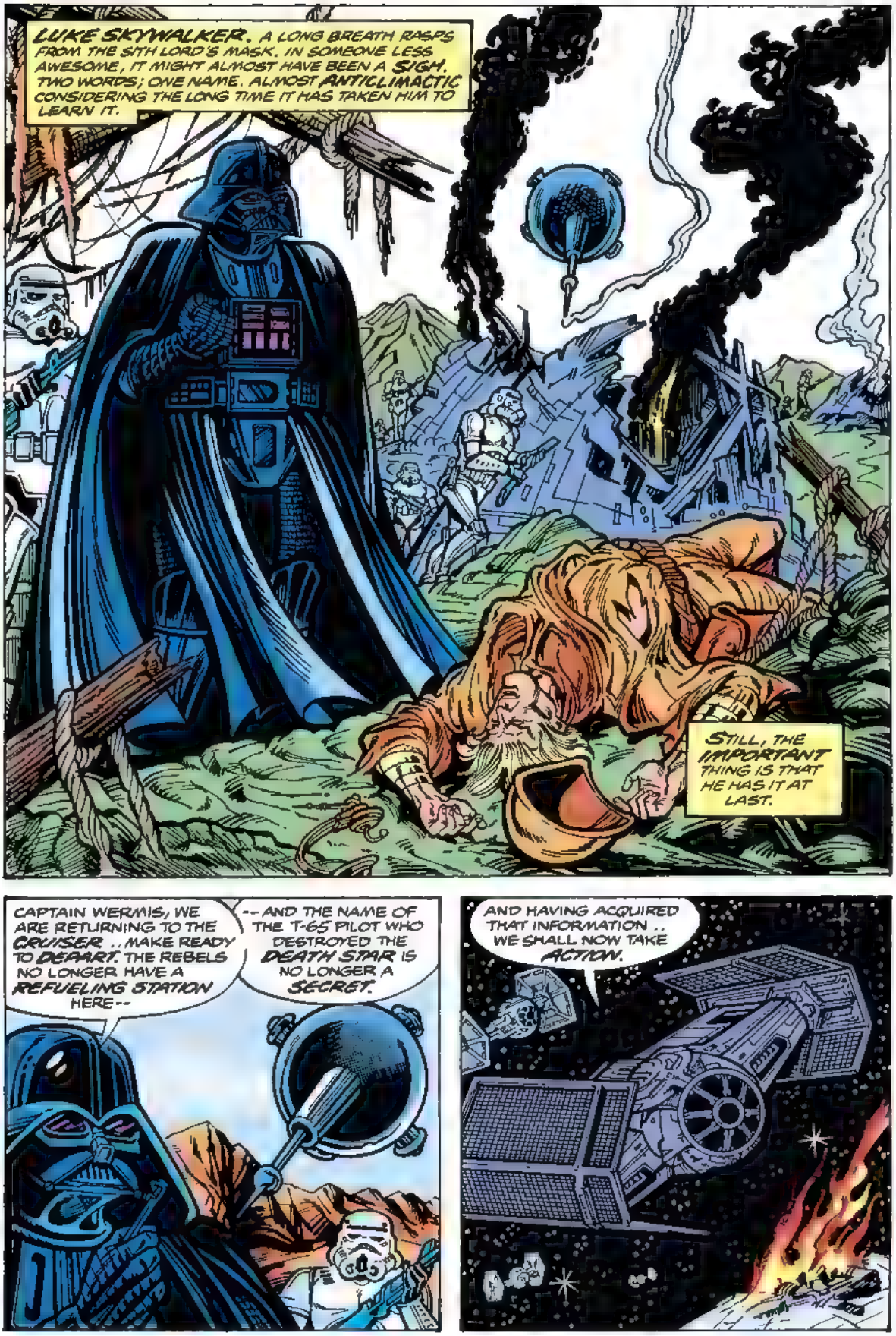
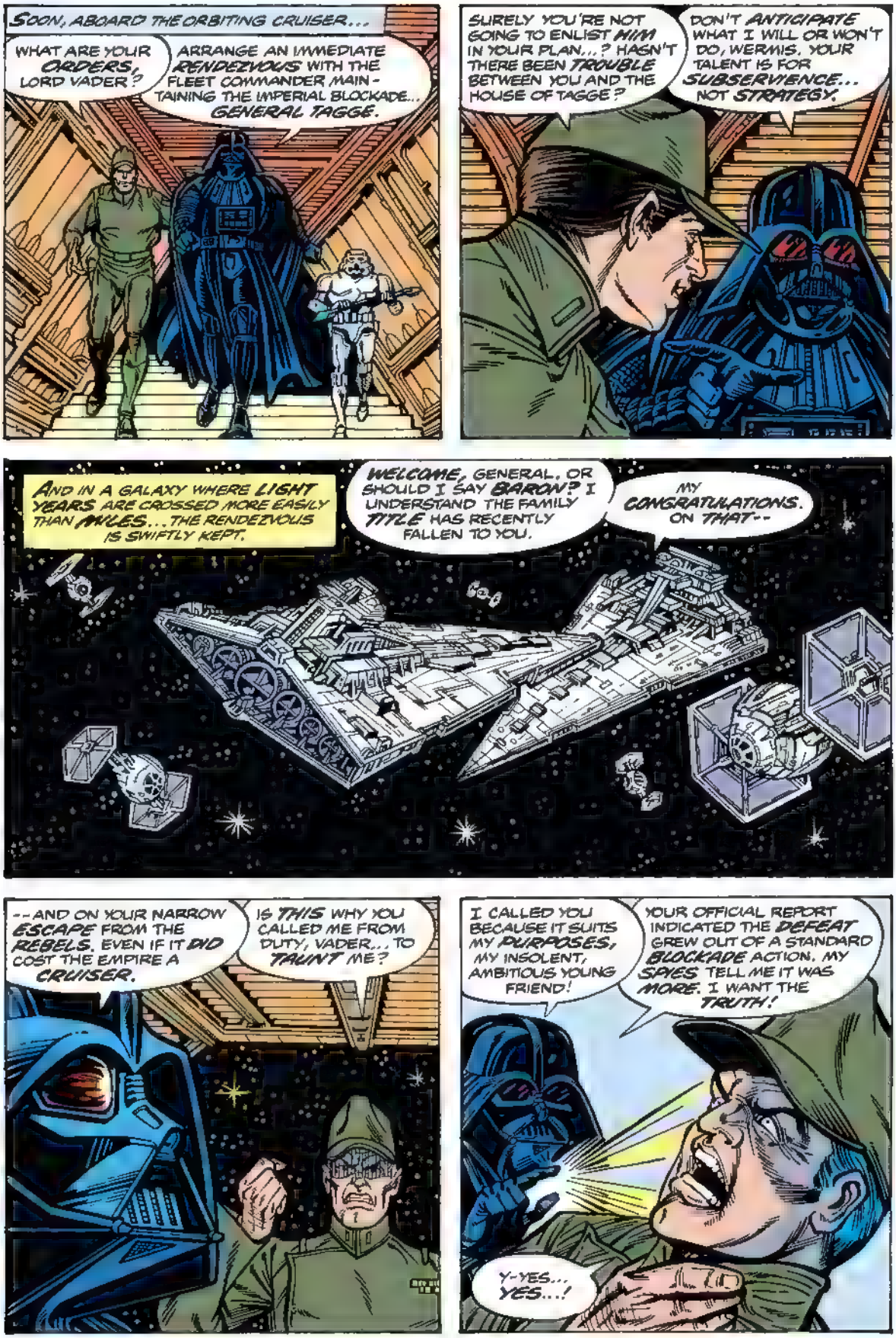
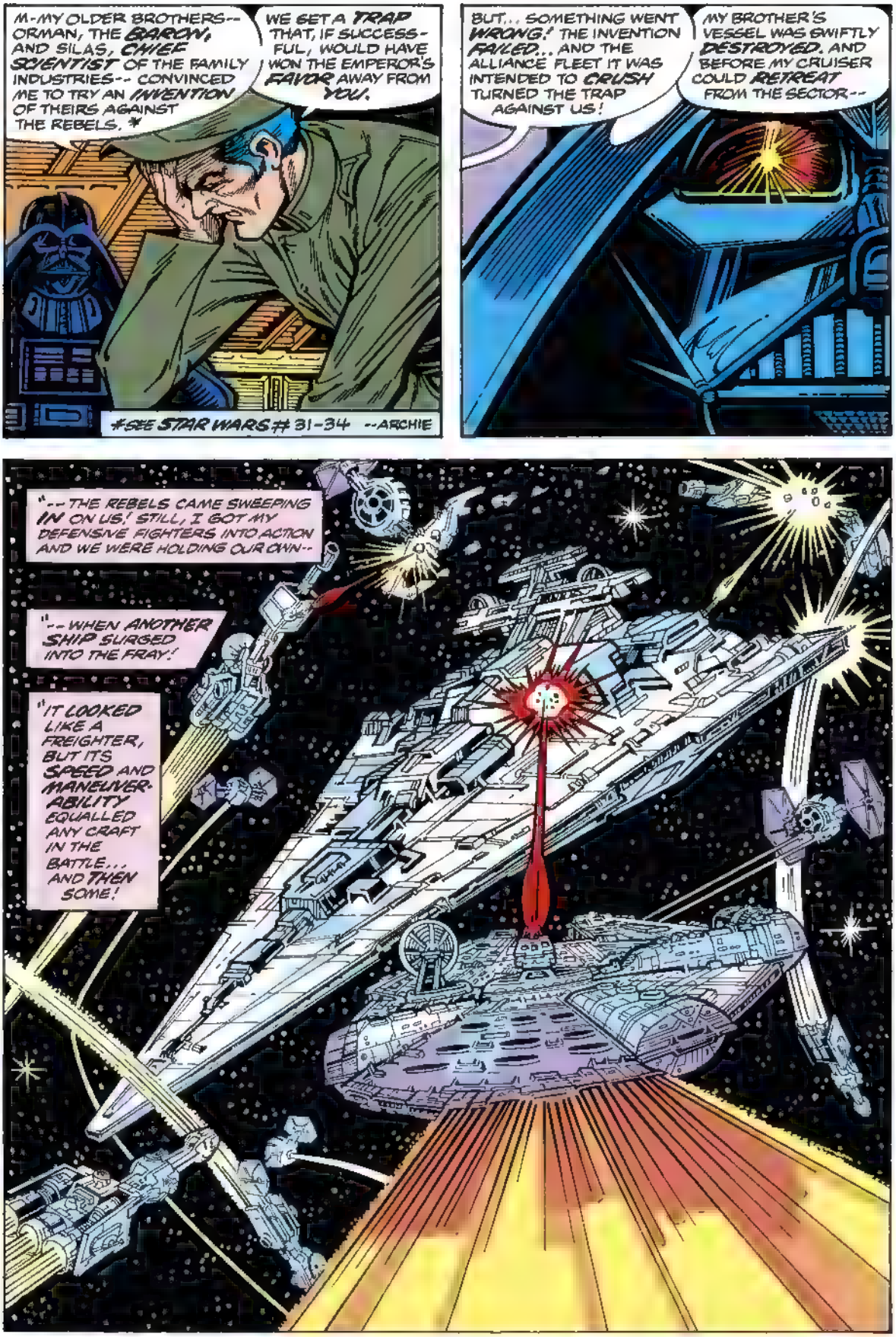
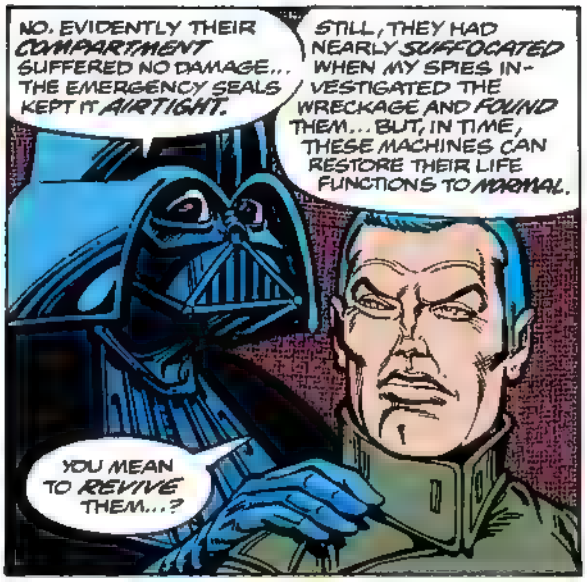
DARK LORD'S GAMBIT

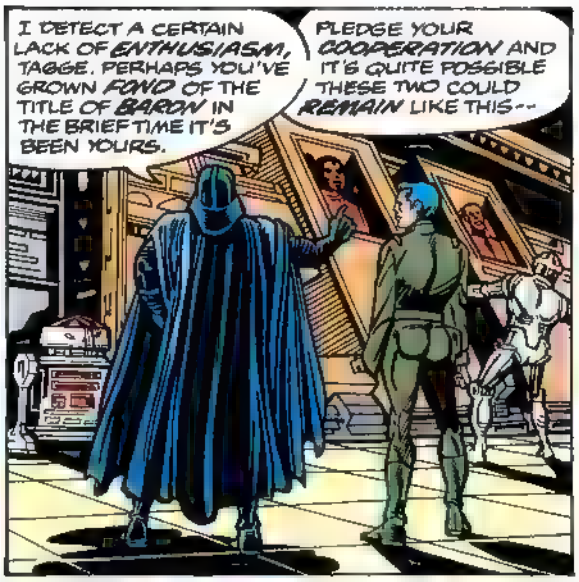

LUKE SKYWALKER. A LONG BREATH RASPS FROM THE SITH LORD'S MASK. IN SOMEONE LESS AWESOME, IT MIGHT ALMOST HAVE BEEN A SIGH. TWO WORDS; ONE NAME. ALMOST ANTICLIMACTIC CONSIDERING THE LONG TIME IT HAS TAKEN HIM TO LEARN IT.
STILL, THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT HE HAS IT AT LAST.
CAPTAIN WERMIS, WE ARE RETURNING TO THE CRUISER .. MAKE READY TO DEPART. THE REBELS NO LONGER HAVE A REFUELING STATION HERE--
--AND THE NAME OF THE T-65 PILOT WHO DESTROYED THE DEATH STAR IS NO LONGER A SECRET.
AND HAVING ACQUIRED THAT INFORMATION .. WE SHALL NOW TAKE ACTION.

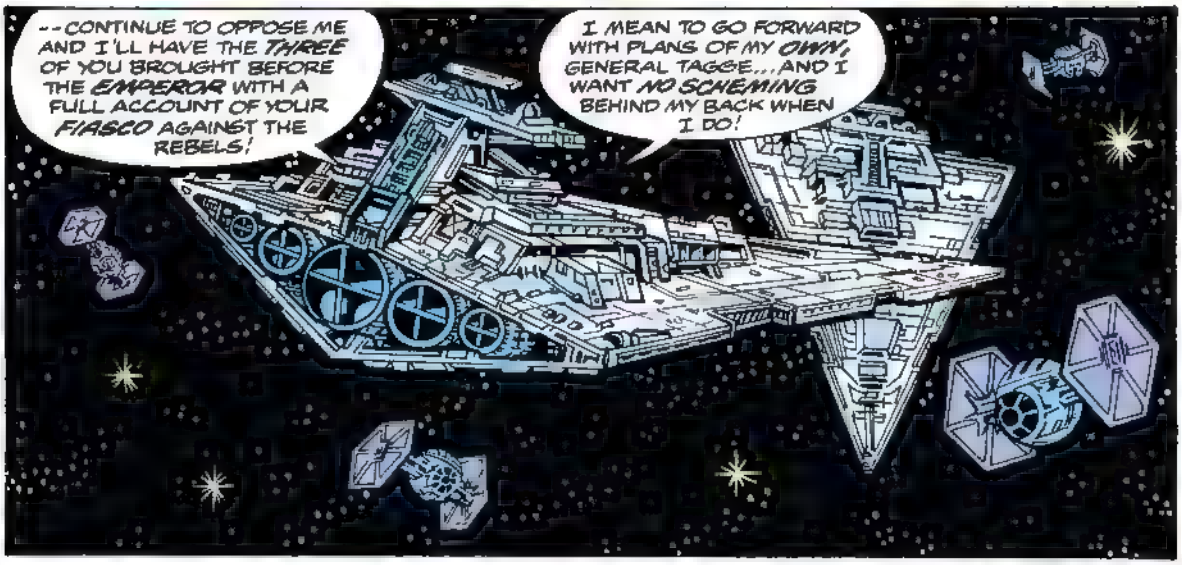

SOON, ABOARD THE ORBITING CRUISER...
WHAT ARE YOUR ORDERS, LORD VADER?
ARRANGE AN IMMEDIATE RENDEZVOUS WITH THE FLEET COMMANDER MAINTAINING THE IMPERIAL BLOCKADE... GENERAL TAGGE.
SURELY YOU'RE NOT GOING TO ENLIST HIM IN YOUR PLAN...? HASN'T THERE BEEN TROUBLE BETWEEN YOU AND THE HOUSE OF TAGGE?
DON'T ANTICIPATE WHAT I WILL OR WON'T DO, WERMIS. YOUR TALENT IS FOR SUBSERVIENCE... NOT STRATEGY.
AND IN A GALAXY WHERE LIGHT YEARS ARE CROSSED MORE EASILY THAN AKLES... THE RENDEZVOUS IS SWIFTLY KEPT.
WELCOME, GENERAL. OR SHOULD I SAY BARON? I UNDERSTAND THE FAMILY TITLE HAS RECENTLY FALLEN TO YOU.
MY CONGRATULATIONS. ON THAT--
--AND ON YOUR NARROW ESCAPE FROM THE REBELS. EVEN IF IT DID COST THE EMPIRE A CRUISER.
IS THIS WHY YOU CALLED ME FROM DUTY, VADER... TO TAUNT ME?
I CALLED YOU BECAUSE IT SUITS MY PURPOSES, MY INSOLENT, AMBITIOUS YOUNG FRIEND!
YOUR OFFICIAL REPORT INDICATED THE DEFEAT GREW OUT OF A STANDARD BLOCKADE ACTION. MY SPIES TELL ME IT WAS MORE. I WANT THE TRUTH!
Y-YES... YES...!

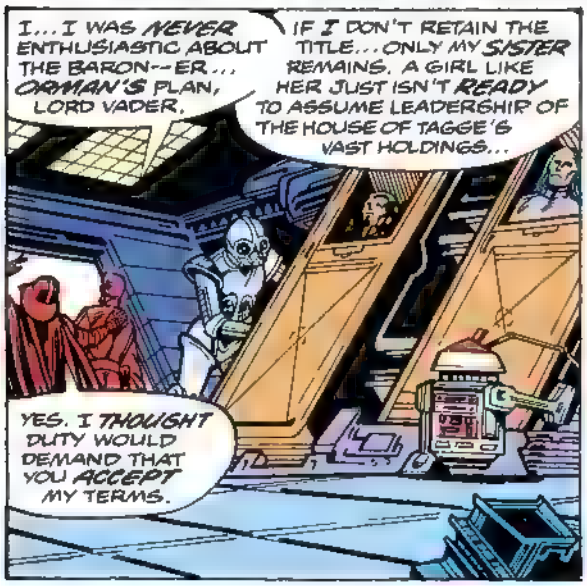

M-MY OLDER BROTHERS-- ORMAN, THE BARON, AND SILAS, CHIEF SCIENTIST OF THE FAMILY INDUSTRIES-- CONVINCED ME TO TRY AN INVENTION OF THEIRS AGAINST THE REBELS. *
WE GET A TRAP THAT, IF SUCCESSFUL, WOULD HAVE WON THE EMPEROR'S FAVOR AWAY FROM YOU.
*SEE STAR WARS # 31-34 --ARCHIE
BUT... SOMETHING WENT WRONG! THE INVENTION FAILED... AND THE ALLIANCE FLEET IT WAS INTENDED TO CRUSH TURNED THE TRAP AGAINST US!
MY BROTHER'S VESSEL WAS SWIFTLY DESTROYED. AND BEFORE MY CRUISER COULD RETREAT FROM THE SECTOR--
"--THE REBELS CAME SWEEPING IN ON US! STILL, I GOT MY DEFENSIVE FIGHTERS INTO ACTION AND WE WERE HOLDING OUR OWN--
"--WHEN ANOTHER SHIP SURGED INTO THE FRAY!
"IT LOOKED LIKE A FREIGHTER, BUT ITS SPEED AND MANEUVER-ABILITY EQUALLED ANY CRAFT IN THE BATTLE... AND THEN SOME!

THE ACCURACY OF ITS FIRE PIERCED ONE OF OUR SHIELDS... A RESERVE REACTOR EXPLODED!
MY STAFF AND I WERE FORCED TO FLEE IN AN ESCAPE CRAFT... EVERYTHING ELSE WAS LOST.
OUR MONITORS PICKED UP SOME OF THE REBELS' SHIP-TO-SHIP COMMUNICATION.
IT LEFT NO DOUBT THAT PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA WAS ABOARD THAT FREIGHTER... AND THAT ITS DEADLY WORK WITH THE LASER CANNON WAS BY INDIVIDUALS NAMED SOLO AND SKYWALKER.
YOU HAD ALL THAT...! THE ONE I'VE BEEN SEEKING... THE SHIP THAT RUINED MY DEFENSE OF THE DEATH STAR . AND YOU LOST IT!
I'M WEARY OF YOUR FAMILY WORKING AT CROSS PURPOSES TO ME, TAGGE!
WE'RE PUTTING AN END TO IT! RIGHT NOW!
BEHOLD!
IT CAN'T BE...! M-MY BROTHERS...! ORMAN... SILAS...! BUT... THEY'RE DEAD... SLAIN BY THE REBELS... DESTROYED WITH THEIR SHIP!

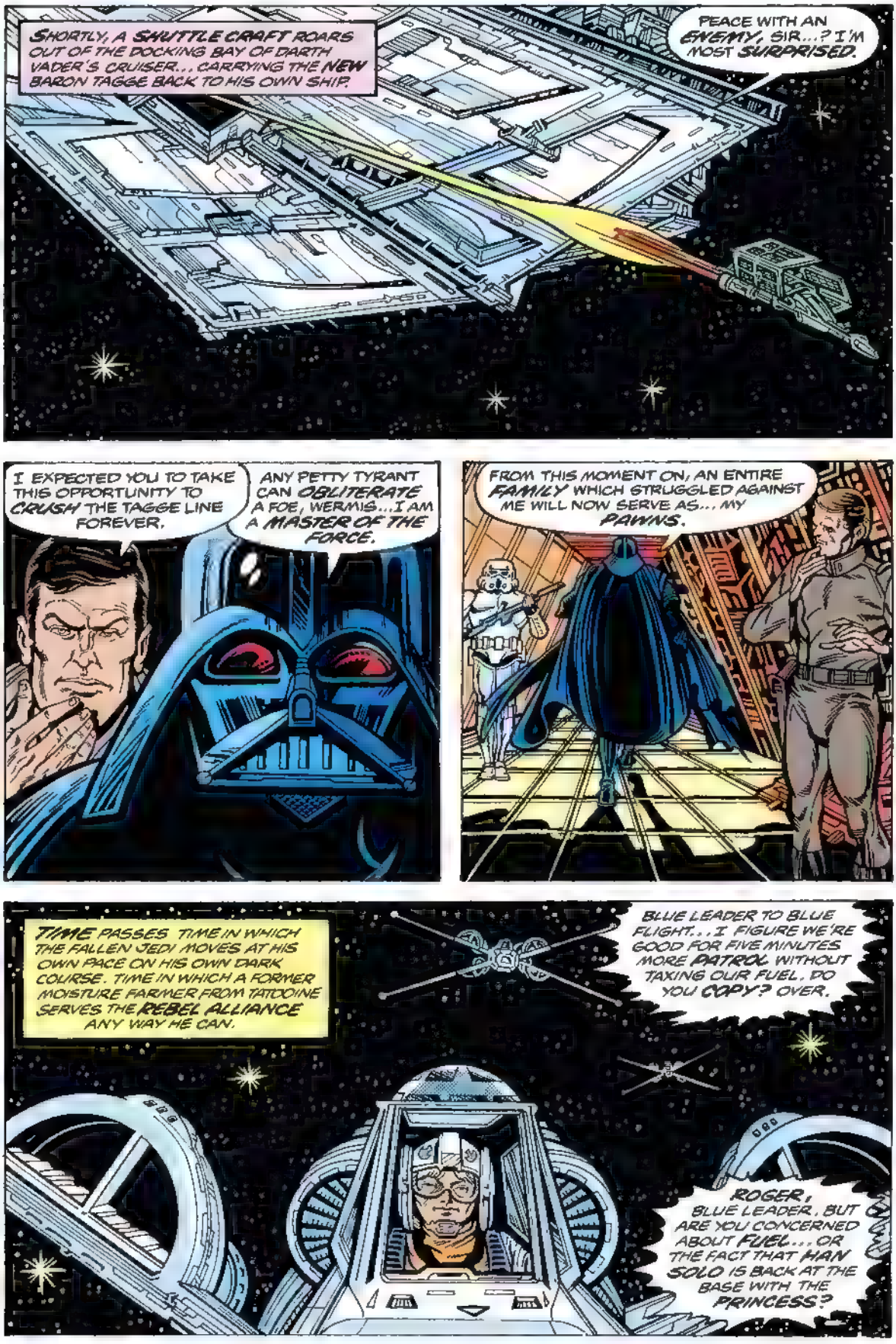

NO. EVIDENTLY THEIR COMPARTMENT SUFFERED NO DAMAGE... THE EMERGENCY SEALS KEPT IT AIRTIGHT.
STILL, THEY HAD NEARLY SUFFOCATED WHEN MY SPIES INVESTIGATED THE WRECKAGE AND FOUND THEM... BUT, IN TIME, THESE MACHINES CAN RESTORE THEIR LIFE FUNCTIONS TO NORMAL.
YOU MEAN TO REVIVE THEM...?

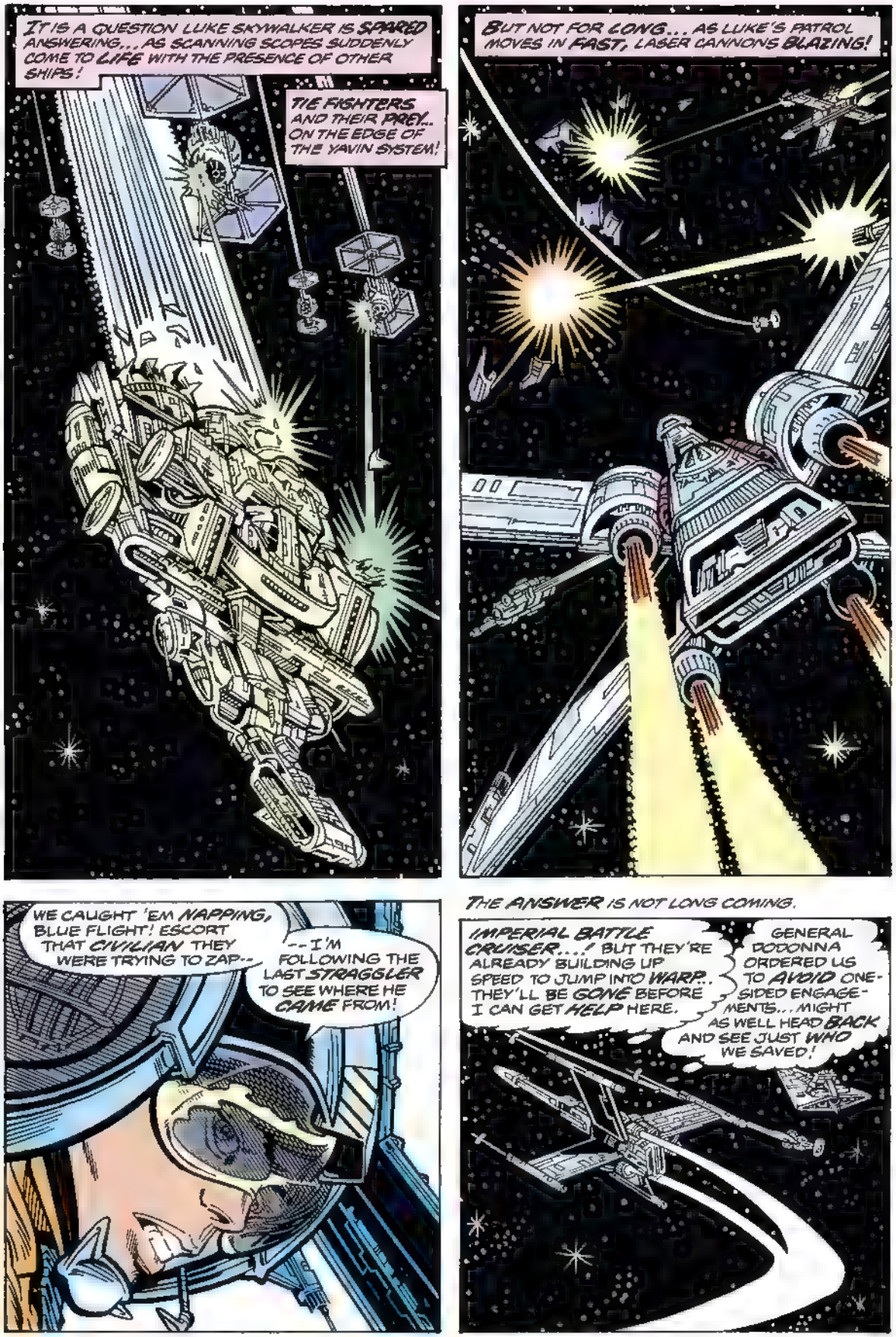

I DETECT A CERTAIN LACK OF ENTHUSIASM, TAGGE. PERHAPS YOU'VE GROWN FOND OF THE TITLE OF BARON IN THE BRIEF TIME IT'S BEEN YOURS.
PLEDGE YOUR COOPERATION AND IT'S QUITE POSSIBLE THESE TWO COULD REMAIN LIKE THIS--

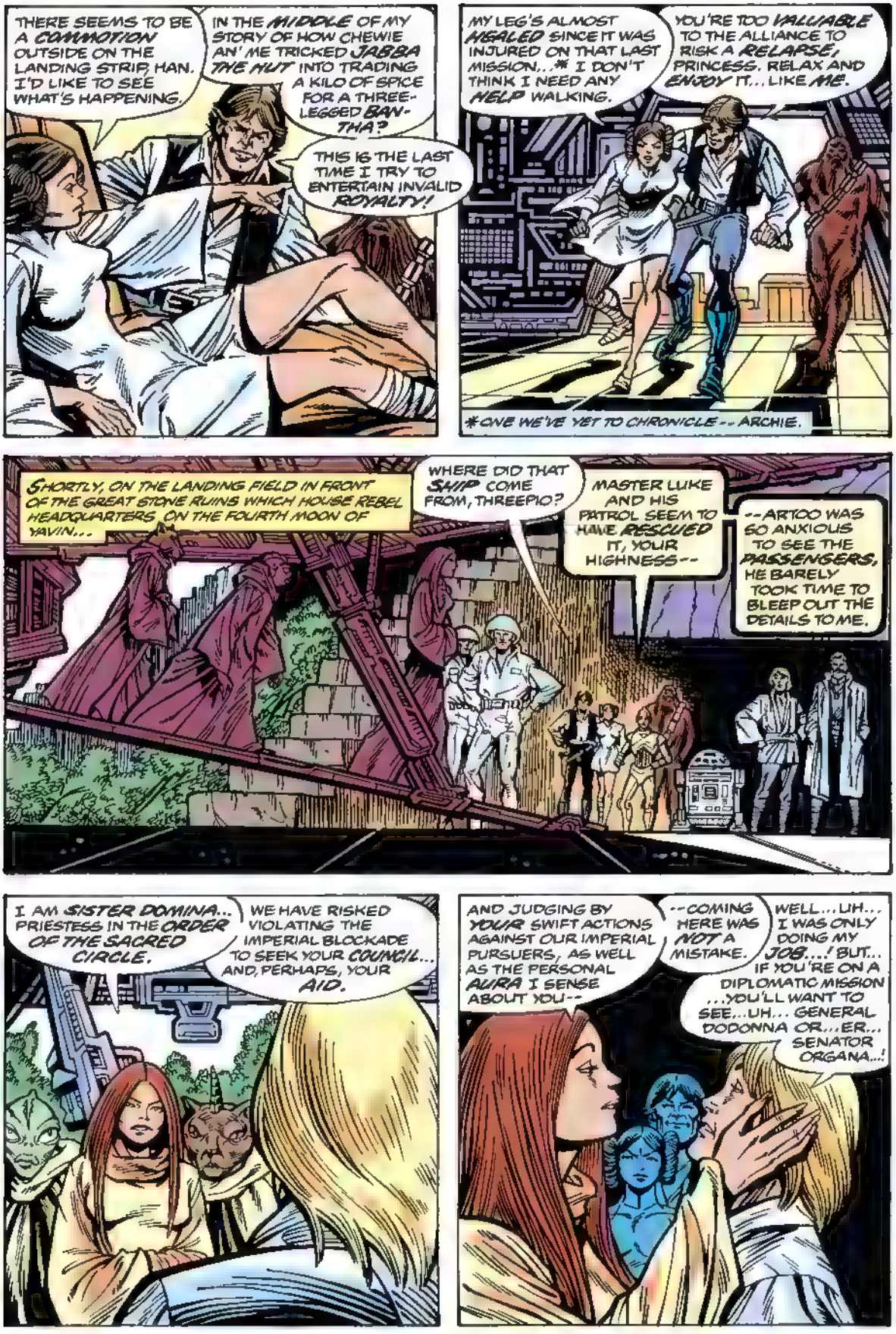

--CONTINUE TO OPPOSE ME AND I'LL HAVE THE THREE OF YOU BROUGHT BEFORE THE EMPEROR WITH A FULL ACCOUNT OF YOUR FIASCO AGAINST THE REBELS!
I MEAN TO GO FORWARD WITH PLANS OF MY OWN, GENERAL TAGGE... AND I WANT NO SCHEMING BEHIND MY BACK WHEN I DO!

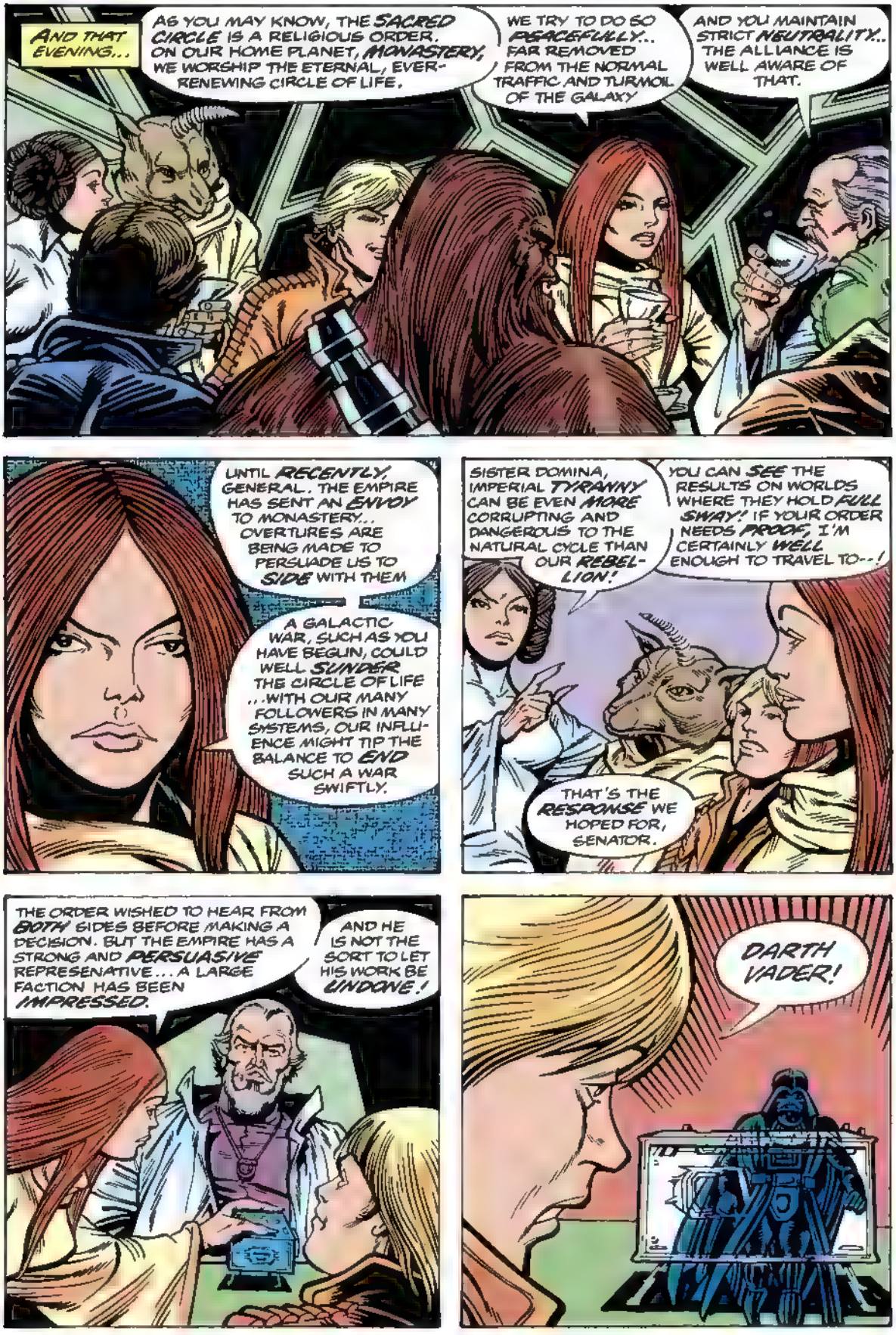

I... I WAS NEVER ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE BARON--ER... ORMAN'S PLAN, LORD VADER.
IF I DON'T RETAIN THE TITLE... ONLY MY SISTER REMAINS. A GIRL LIKE HER JUST ISN'T READY TO ASSUME LEADERSHIP OF THE HOUSE OF TAGGE'S VAST HOLDINGS...
YES. I THOUGHT DUTY WOULD DEMAND THAT YOU ACCEPT MY TERMS.

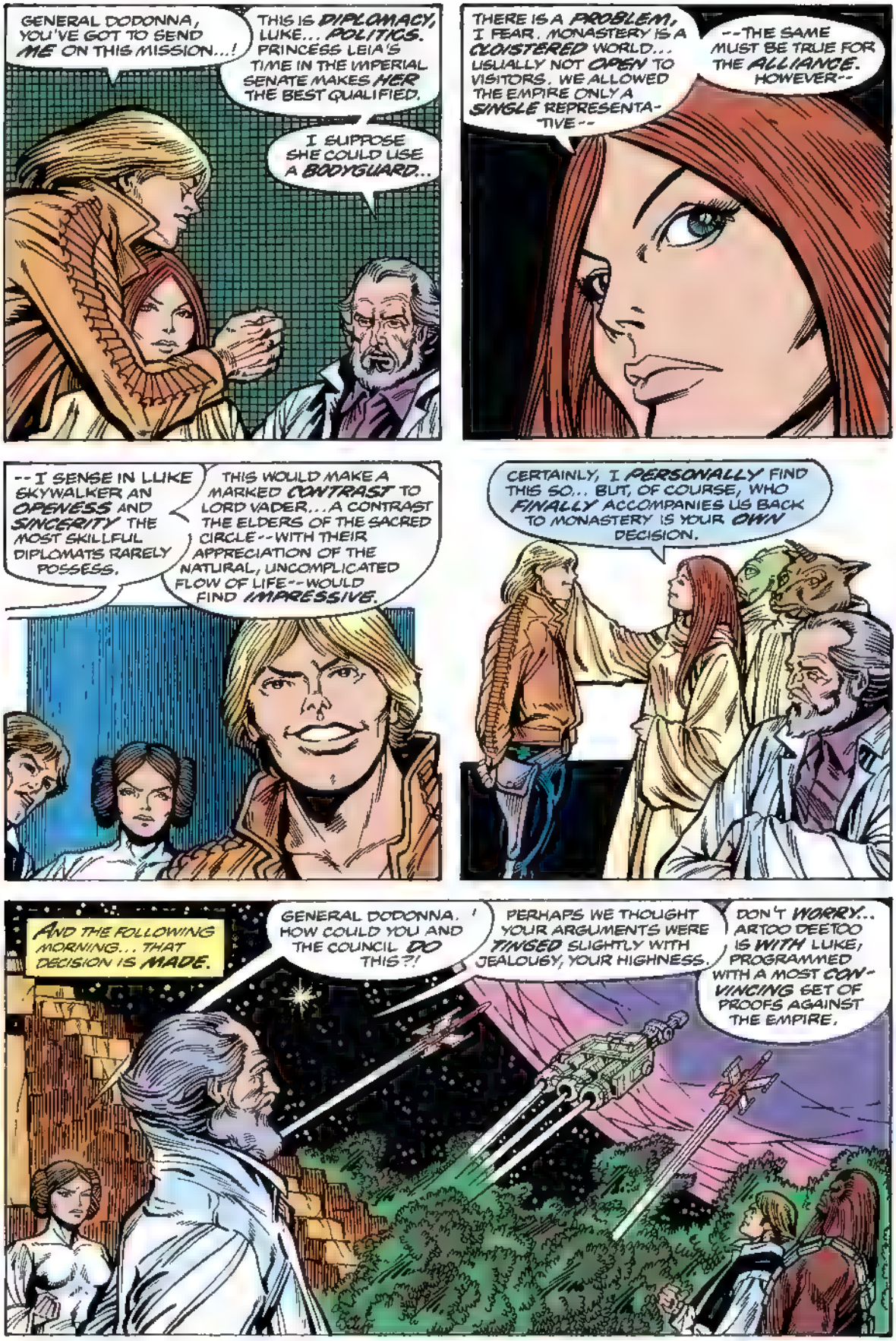
THEN I WILL PROCEED, TAGGE... KNOWING I HAVE THE COMPLETE LOYALTY OF ONE OF THE EMPIRE'S MOST PROMISING NOBLES AND MILITARY MEN.
PERHAPS IT IS A TRICK OF THE CHAMBER'S SUBDUED LIGHT, BUT AS THE SITH LORD AND GENERAL TAGGE DEPART.. THE TRANCE-BOUND FACE OF ORMAN TAGGE SEEMS TO TWIST WITH HATRED AND RAGE!

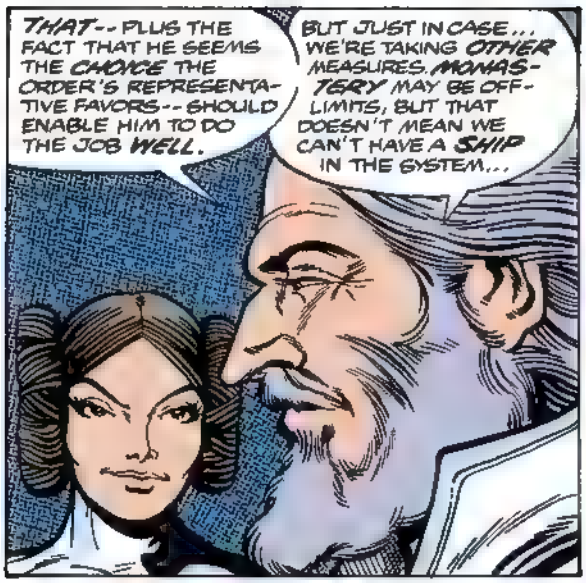

SHORTLY, A SHUTTLE CRAFT ROARS OUT OF THE DOCKING BAY OF DARTH VADER'S CRUISER... CARRYING THE NEW BARON TAGGE BACK TO HIS OWN SHIP.
PEACE WITH AN ENEMY, SIR...? I'M MOST SURPRISED.
I EXPECTED YOU TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CRUSH THE TAGGE LINE FOREVER.
ANY PETTY TYRANT CAN OBLITERATE A FOE, WERMIS... I AM A MASTER OF THE FORCE.
FROM THIS MOMENT ON, AN ENTIRE FAMILY WHICH STRUGGLED AGAINST ME WILL NOW SERVE AS... MY PAWNS.
TIME PASSES. TIME IN WHICH THE FALLEN JEDI MOVES AT HIS OWN PACE ON HIS OWN DARK COURSE. TIME IN WHICH A FORMER MOISTURE FARMER FROM TATOOINE SERVES THE REBEL ALLIANCE ANY WAY HE CAN.
BLUE LEADER TO BLUE FLIGHT... I FIGURE WE'RE GOOD FOR FIVE MINUTES MORE PATROL WITHOUT TAXING OUR FUEL. DO YOU COPY? OVER.
ROGER, BLUE LEADER. BUT ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT FUEL... OR THE FACT THAT HAN SOLO IS BACK AT THE BASE WITH THE PRINCESS?


IT IS A QUESTION LUKE SKYWALKER IS SPARED ANSWERING... AS SCANNING SCOPES SUDDENLY COME TO LIFE WITH THE PRESENCE OF OTHER SHIPS!
TIE FIGHTERS AND THEIR PREY.. ON THE EDGE OF THE YAVIN SYSTEM!
BUT NOT FOR LONG... AS LUKE'S PATROL MOVES IN FAST, LASER CANNONS BLAZING!
WE CAUGHT 'EM NAPPING, BLUE FLIGHT! ESCORT THAT CIVILIAN THEY WERE TRYING TO ZAP--
--I'M FOLLOWING THE LAST STRAGGLER TO SEE WHERE HE CAME FROM!
THE ANSWER IS NOT LONG COMING.
IMPERIAL BATTLE CRUISER...! BUT THEY'RE ALREADY BUILDING UP SPEED TO JUMP INTO WARP.. THEY'LL BE GONE BEFORE I CAN GET HELP HERE.
GENERAL DODONNA ORDERED US TO AVOID ONE-SIDED ENGAGEMENTS... MIGHT AS WELL HEAD BACK AND SEE JUST WHO WE SAVED!

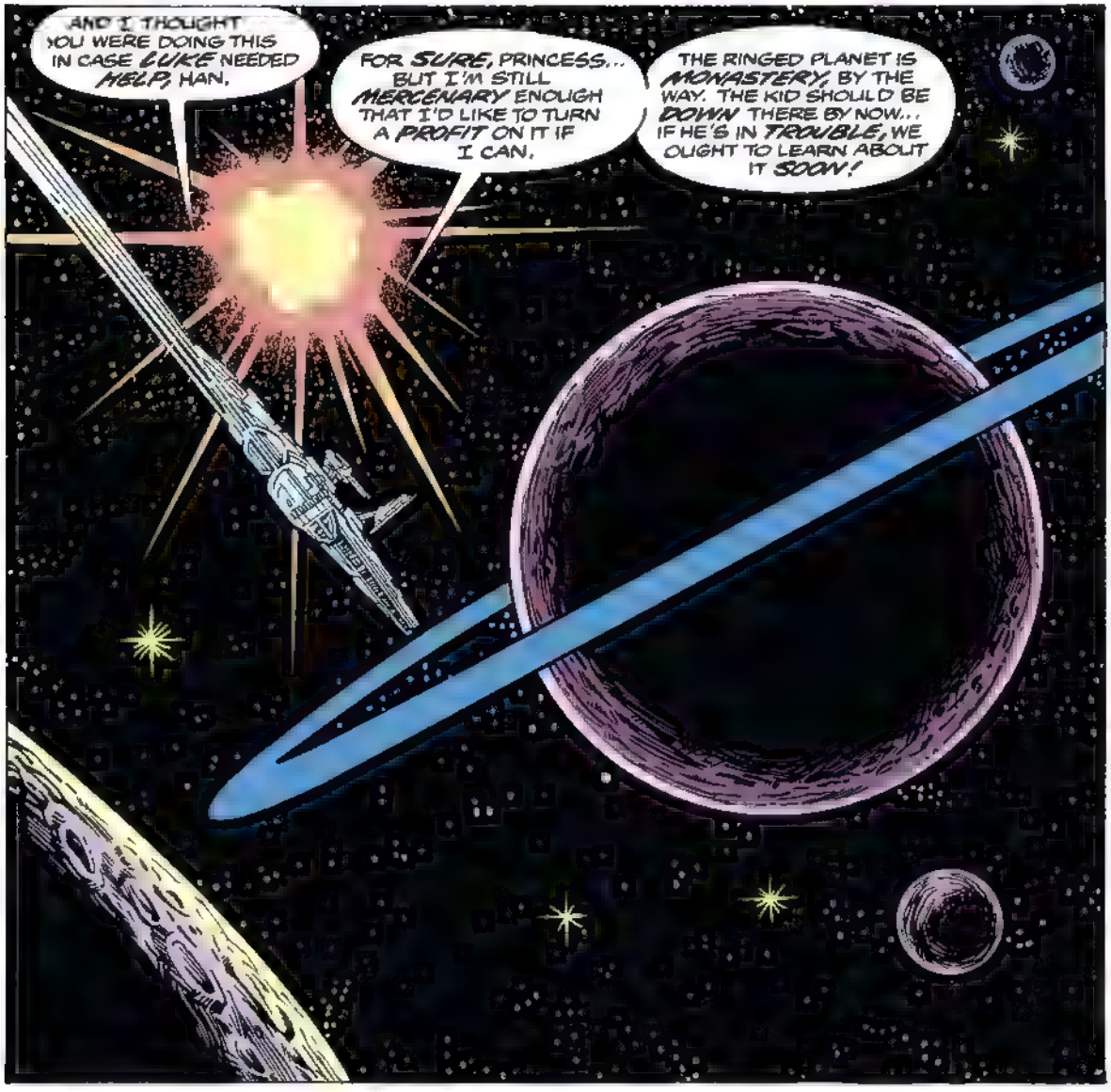

THERE SEEMS TO BE A COMMOTION OUTSIDE ON THE LANDING STRIP, HAN. I'D LIKE TO SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING.
IN THE MIDDLE OF MY STORY OF HOW CHEWIE AN' ME TRICKED JABBA THE HUT INTO TRADING A KILO OF SPICE FOR A THREE-LEGGED BANTHA?
THIS IS THE LAST TIME I TRY TO ENTERTAIN INVALID ROYALTY!
MY LEG'S ALMOST HEALED SINCE IT WAS INJURED ON THAT LAST MISSION...* I DON'T THINK I NEED ANY HELP WALKING.
YOU'RE TOO VALUABLE TO THE ALLIANCE TO RISK A RELAPSE, PRINCESS. RELAX AND ENJOY IT... LIKE ME.
*ONE WE'VE YET TO CHRONICLE -- ARCHIE.
SHORTLY, ON THE LANDING FIELD IN FRONT OF THE GREAT STONE RUINS WHICH HOUSE REBEL HEADQUARTERS ON THE FOURTH MOON OF YAVIN...
WHERE DID THAT SHIP COME FROM, THREEPIO?
MASTER LUKE AND HIS PATROL SEEM TO HAVE RESCUED IT, YOUR HIGHNESS--
--ARTOO WAS SO ANXIOUS TO SEE THE PASSENGERS, HE BARELY TOOK TIME TO BLEEP OUT THE DETAILS TO ME.
I AM SISTER DOMINA... PRIESTESS IN THE ORDER OF THE SACRED CIRCLE.
WE HAVE RISKED VIOLATING THE IMPERIAL BLOCKADE TO SEEK YOUR COUNCIL... AND, PERHAPS, YOUR AID.
AND JUDGING BY YOUR SWIFT ACTIONS AGAINST OUR IMPERIAL PURSUERS, AS WELL AS THE PERSONAL AURA I SENSE ABOUT YOU--
--COMING HERE WAS NOT A MISTAKE.
WELL... UH... I WAS ONLY DOING MY JOB...! BUT... IF YOU'RE ON A DIPLOMATIC MISSION ...YOU'LL WANT TO SEE... UH... GENERAL DODONNA OR... ER... SENATOR ORGANA...!

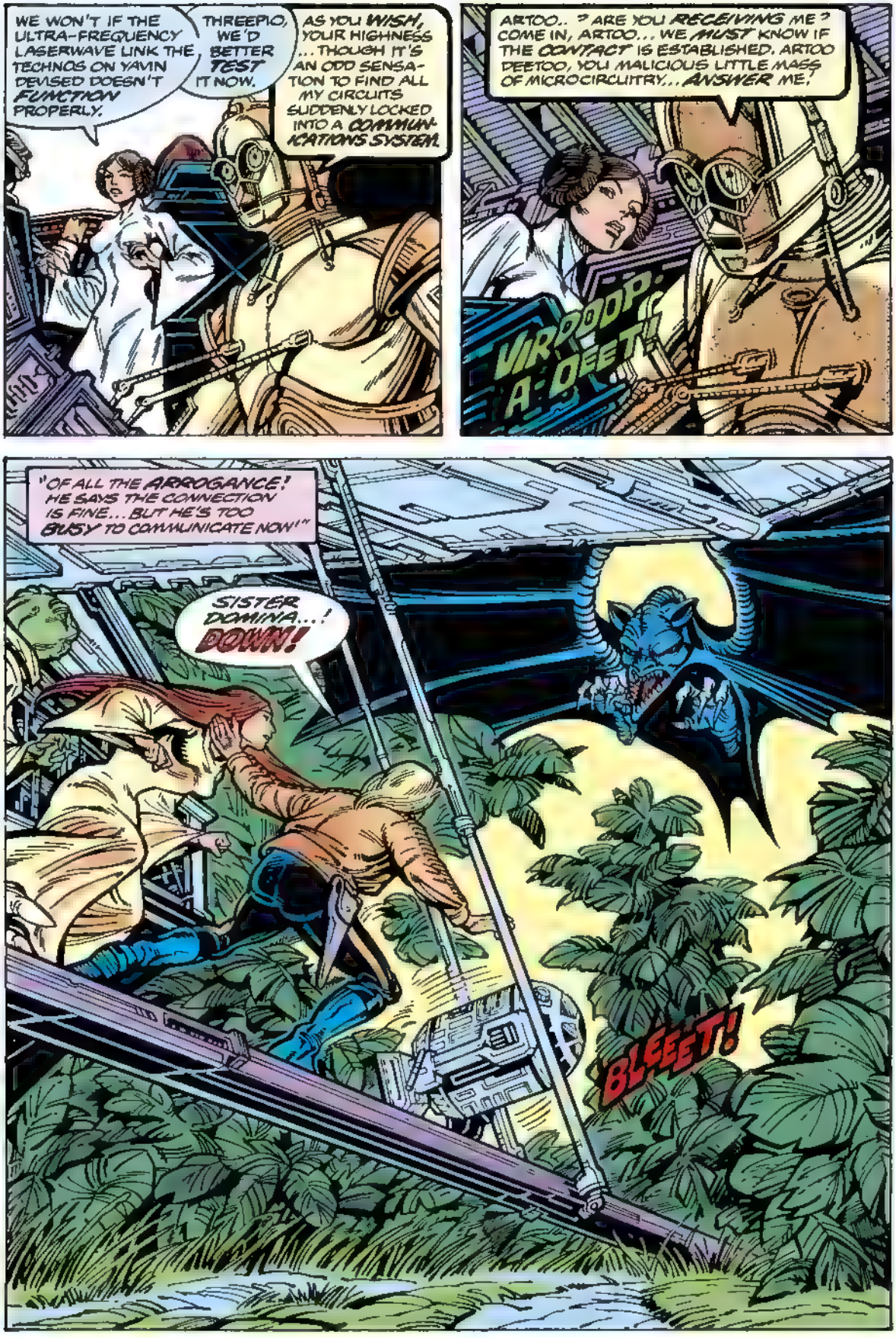

AND THAT EVENING...
AS YOU MAY KNOW, THE SACRED CIRCLE IS A RELIGIOUS ORDER. ON OUR HOME PLANET, MONASTERY, WE WORSHIP THE ETERNAL, EVER-RENEWING CIRCLE OF LIFE.
WE TRY TO DO SO PEACEFULLY... FAR REMOVED FROM THE NORMAL TRAFFIC AND TURMOIL OF THE GALAXY
AND YOU MAINTAIN STRICT NEUTRALITY... THE ALLIANCE IS WELL AWARE OF THAT.
UNTIL RECENTLY, GENERAL, THE EMPIRE HAS SENT AN ENVOY TO MONASTERY... OVERTURES ARE BEING MADE TO PERSUADE US TO SIDE WITH THEM
A GALACTIC WAR, SUCH AS YOU HAVE BEGUN, COULD WELL SUNDER THE CIRCLE OF LIFE ...WITH OUR MANY FOLLOWERS IN MANY SYSTEMS, OUR INFLUENCE MIGHT TIP THE BALANCE TO END SUCH A WAR SWIFTLY.
SISTER DOMINA, IMPERIAL TYRANNY CAN BE EVEN MORE CORRUPTING AND DANGEROUS TO THE NATURAL CYCLE THAN OUR REBELLION!
YOU CAN SEE THE RESULTS ON WORLDS WHERE THEY HOLD FULL SWAY! IF YOUR ORDER NEEDS PROOF, I'M CERTAINLY WELL ENOUGH TO TRAVEL TO--!
THAT'S THE RESPONSE WE HOPED FOR, SENATOR.
THE ORDER WISHED TO HEAR FROM BOTH SIDES BEFORE MAKING A DECISION. BUT THE EMPIRE HAS A STRONG AND PERSUASIVE REPRESENATIVE... A LARGE FACTION HAS BEEN IMPRESSED.
AND HE IS NOT THE SORT TO LET HIS WORK BE UNDONE!
DARTH VADER!

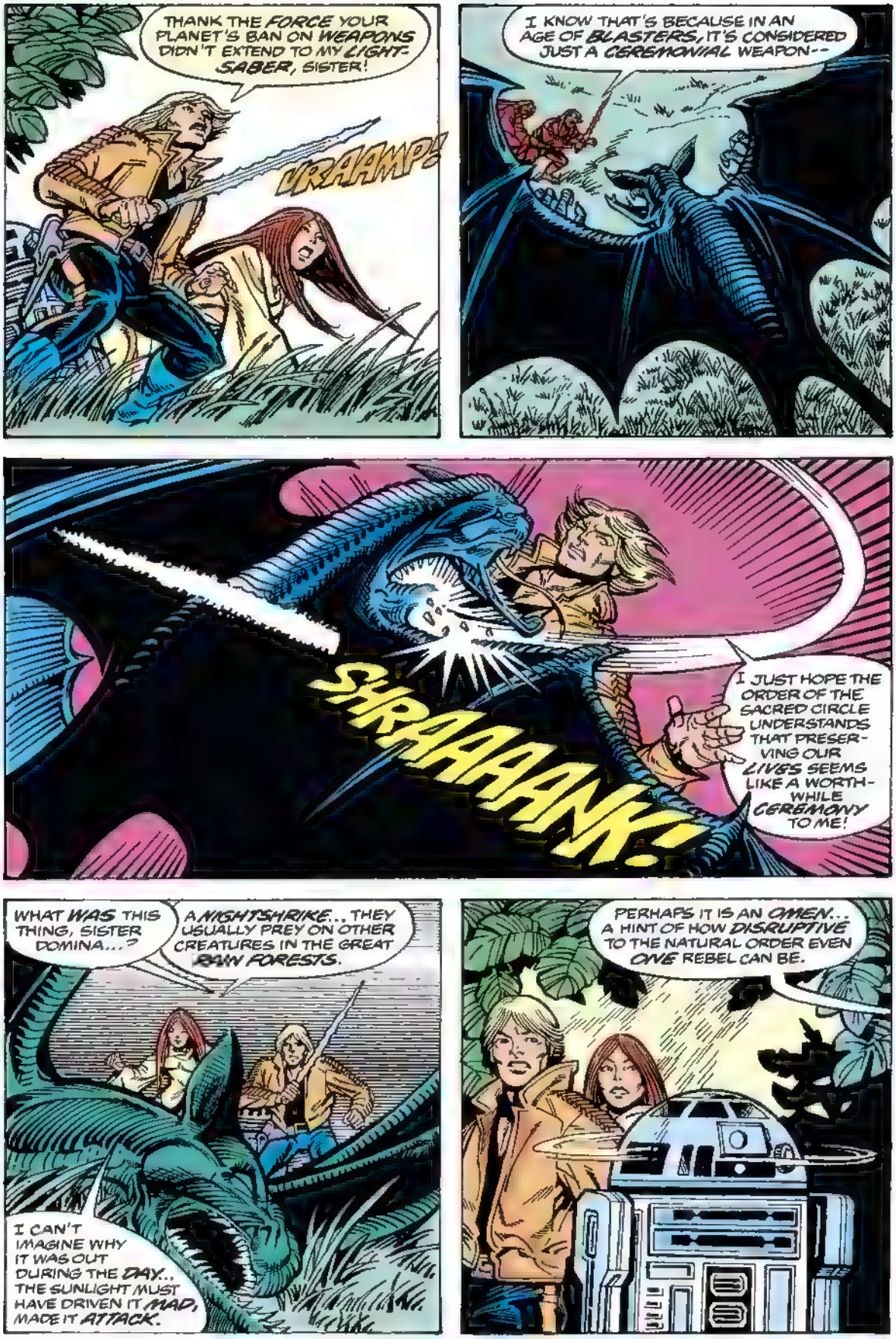

GENERAL DODONNA, YOU'VE GOT TO SEND ME ON THIS MISSION...!
THIS IS DIPLOMACY, LUKE... POLITICS. PRINCESS LEIA'S TIME IN THE IMPERIAL SENATE MAKES HER THE BEST QUALIFIED.
I SUPPOSE SHE COULD USE A BODYGUARD..
THERE IS A PROBLEM, I FEAR. MONASTERY IS A CLOISTERED WORLD... USUALLY NOT OPEN TO VISITORS. WE ALLOWED THE EMPIRE ONLY A SINGLE REPRESENTATIVE--
--THE SAME MUST BE TRUE FOR THE ALLIANCE. HOWEVER--
--I SENSE IN LUKE SKYWALKER AN OPENESS AND SINCERITY THE MOST SKILLFUL DIPLOMATS RARELY POSSESS.
THIS WOULD MAKE A MARKED CONTRAST TO LORD VADER... A CONTRAST THE ELDERS OF THE SACRED CIRCLE--WITH THEIR APPRECIATION OF THE NATURAL, UNCOMPLICATED FLOW OF LIFE--WOULD FIND IMPRESSIVE.
CERTAINLY, I PERSONALLY FIND THIS SO.. BUT, OF COURSE, WHO FINALLY ACCOMPANIES US BACK TO MONASTERY IS YOUR OWN DECISION.
AND THE FOLLOWING MORNING... THAT DECISION IS MADE.
GENERAL DODONNA, HOW COULD YOU AND THE COUNCIL DO THIS?!
PERHAPS WE THOUGHT YOUR ARGUMENTS WERE TINGED SLIGHTLY WITH JEALOUSY, YOUR HIGHNESS.
DON'T WORRY... ARTOO DEETOO IS WITH LUKE, PROGRAMMED WITH A MOST CONVINCING SET OF PROOFS AGAINST THE EMPIRE.

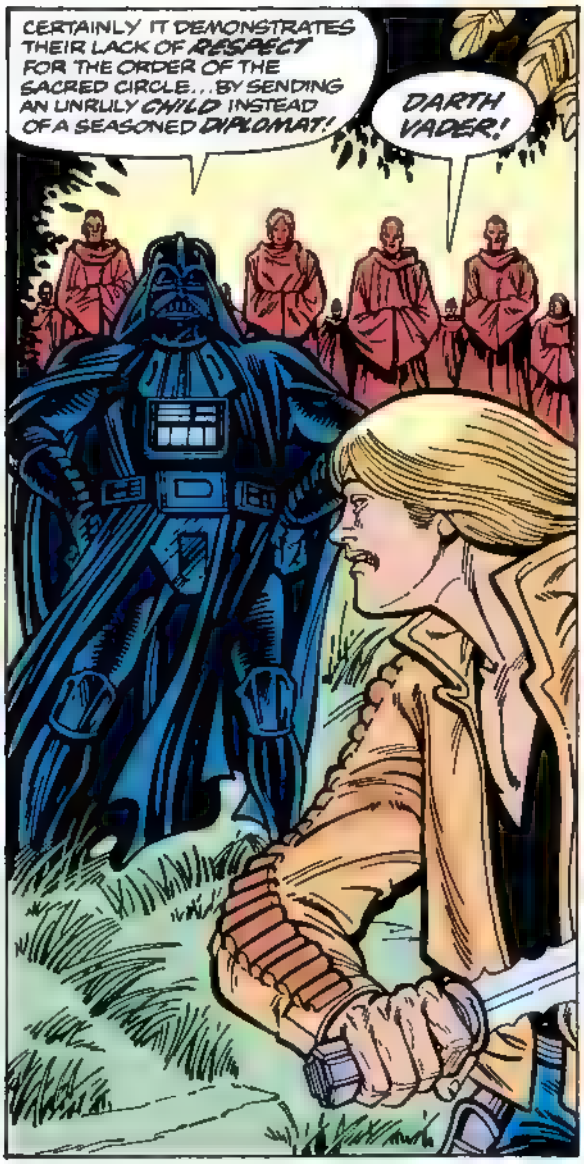

THAT-- PLUS THE FACT THAT HE SEEMS THE CHOICE THE ORDER'S REPRESENTATIVE FAVORS-- SHOULD ENABLE HIM TO DO THE JOB WELL.
BUT JUST IN CASE... WE'RE TAKING OTHER MEASURES. MONASTERY MAY BE OFF-LIMITS, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T HAVE A SHIP IN THE SYSTEM...

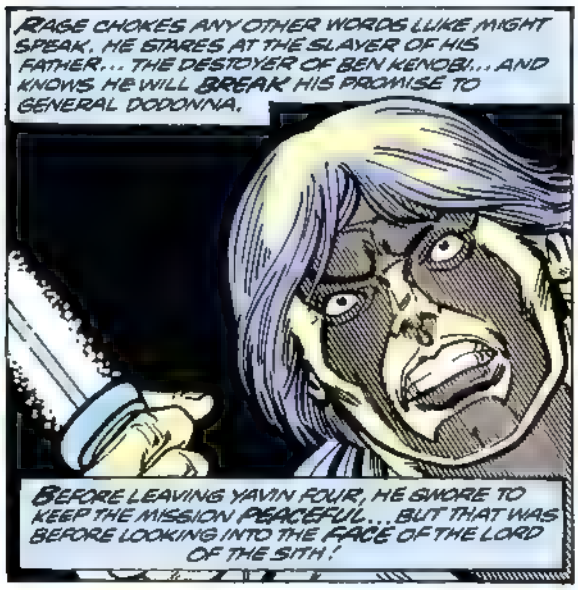
"...ONE THAT'S NOT TOO CONSPICUOUS... LIKE A SPACE FREIGHTER."
WE'RE COMING OUT OF WARP, YOUR ROYALNESS... ONE MORE ITEM FOR A VERY LONG BILL I'M GOING TO SUBMIT TO YOUR ALLIANCE ACCOUNTANTS ONE OF THESE DAYS!


AND I THOUGHT YOU WERE DOING THIS IN CASE LUKE NEEDED HELP, HAN.
FOR SURE, PRINCESS... BUT I'M STILL MERCENARY ENOUGH THAT I'D LIKE TO TURN A PROFIT ON IT IF I CAN.
THE RINGED PLANET IS MONASTERY, BY THE WAY. THE KID SHOULD BE DOWN THERE BY NOW... IF HE'S IN TROUBLE, WE OUGHT TO LEARN ABOUT IT SOON!

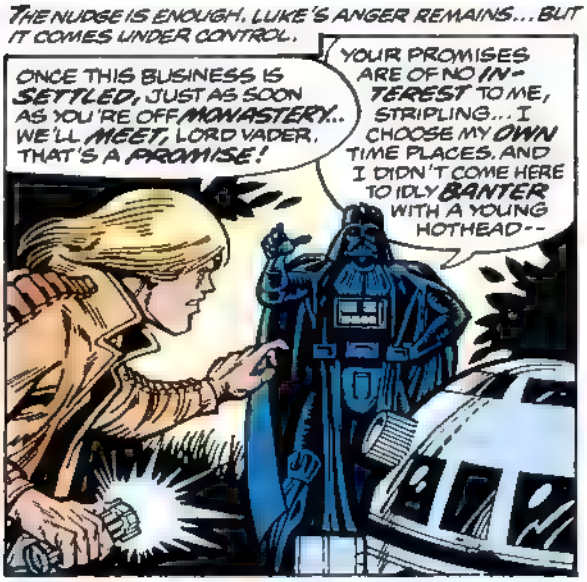

WE WON'T IF THE ULTRA-FREQUENCY LASERWAVE LINK THE TECHNOS ON YAVIN DEVISED DOESN'T FUNCTION PROPERLY.
THREEPIO, WE'D BETTER TEST IT NOW.
AS YOU WISH, YOUR HIGHNESS ... THOUGH IT'S AN ODD SENSATION TO FIND ALL MY CIRCUITS SUDDENLY LOCKED INTO A COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM.
ARTOO.. ? ARE YOU RECEIVING ME ? COME IN, ARTOO... WE MUST KNOW IF THE CONTACT IS ESTABLISHED. ARTOO DEETOO, YOU MALICIOUS LITTLE MASS OF MICROCIRCUITRY... ANSWER ME!
VIRDOOP A-DEET!
"OF ALL THE ARROGANCE! HE SAYS THE CONNECTION IS FINE... BUT HE'S TOO BUSY TO COMMUNICATE NOW!"
SISTER DOMINA...! DOWN!
BLEEET!

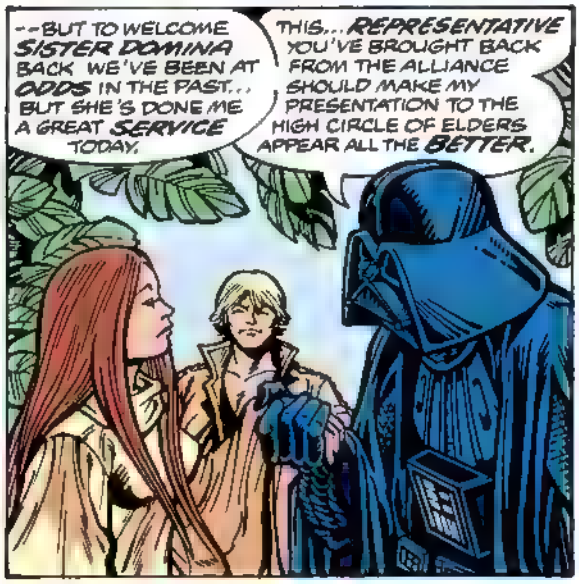

THANK THE FORCE YOUR PLANET'S BAN ON WEAPONS DIDN'T EXTEND TO MY LIGHT-SABER, SISTER!
VRAAMP!
I KNOW THAT'S BECAUSE IN AN AGE OF BLASTERS, IT'S CONSIDERED JUST A CEREMONIAL WEAPON--
SHRAAAAK!
I JUST HOPE THE ORDER OF THE SACRED CIRCLE UNDERSTANDS THAT PRESERVING OUR LIVES SEEMS LIKE A WORTHWHILE CEREMONY TO ME!
WHAT WAS THIS THING, SISTER DOMINA...?
A NIGHTSHRIKE... THEY USUALLY PREY ON OTHER CREATURES IN THE GREAT RAIN FORESTS.
I CAN'T IMAGINE WHY IT WAS OUT DURING THE DAY... THE SUNLIGHT MUST HAVE DRIVEN IT MAD, MADE IT ATTACK.
PERHAPS IT IS AN OMEN... A HINT OF HOW DISRUPTIVE TO THE NATURAL ORDER EVEN ONE REBEL CAN BE.

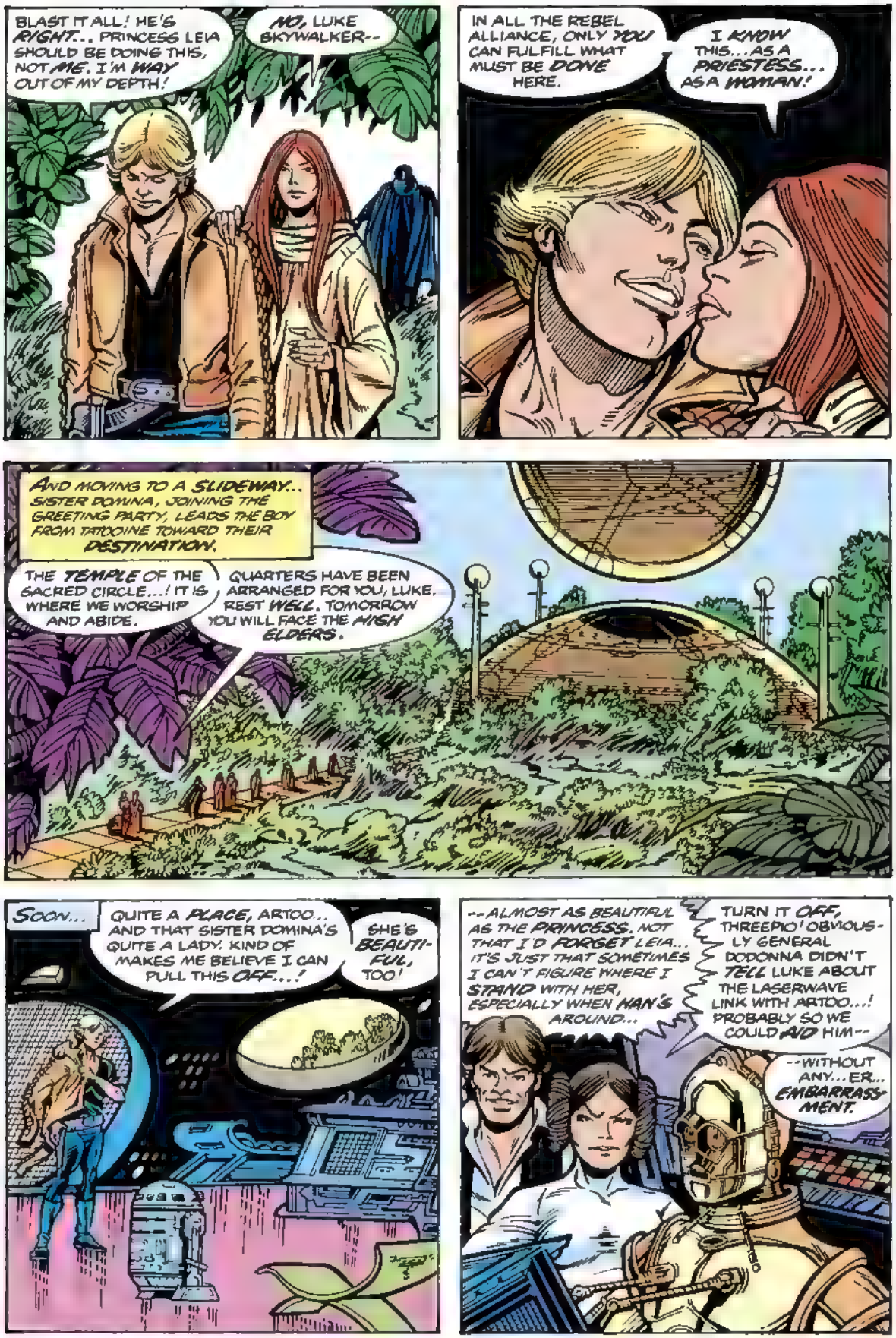

CERTAINLY IT DEMONSTRATES THEIR LACK OF RESPECT FOR THE ORDER OF THE SACRED CIRCLE... BY SENDING AN UNRULY CHILD INSTEAD OF A SEASONED DIPLOMAT!
DARTH VADER!

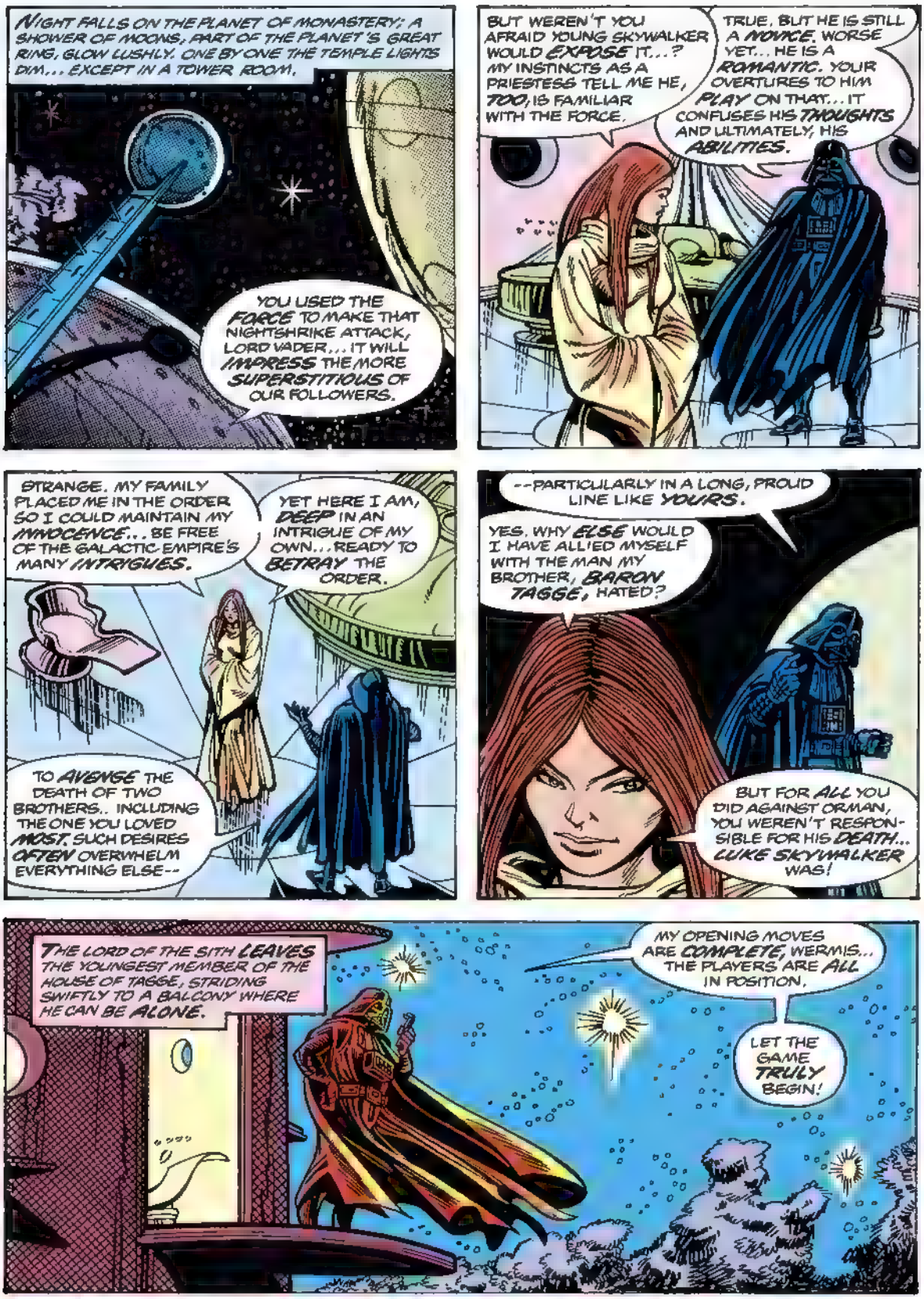

RAGE CHOKES ANY OTHER WORDS LUKE MIGHT SPEAK. HE STARES AT THE SLAYER OF HIS FATHER... THE DESTOYER OF BEN KENOBI... AND KNOWS HE WILL BREAK HIS PROMISE TO GENERAL DODONNA.
BEFORE LEAVING YAVIN FOUR, HE SWORE TO KEEP THE MISSION PEACEFUL... BUT THAT WAS BEFORE LOOKING INTO THE FACE OF THE LORD OF THE SITH!

BUT IF THE URGE TO REVENGE MAKES LUKE FORSAKE EVERYTHING... SOMEONE ELSE IS READY TO REMIND HIM!
FREEDA-BRRRT!


THE NUDGE IS ENOUGH. LUKE'S ANGER REMAINS... BUT IT COMES UNDER CONTROL.
ONCE THIS BUSINESS IS SETTLED, JUST AS SOON AS YOU'RE OFF MONASTERY.. WE'LL MEET, LORD VADER. THAT'S A PROMISE!
YOUR PROMISES ARE OF NO INTEREST TO ME, STRIPLING... I CHOOSE MY OWN TIME PLACES. AND I DIDN'T COME HERE TO IDLY BANTER WITH A YOUNG HOTHEAD--


--BUT TO WELCOME SISTER DOMINA BACK. WE'VE BEEN AT ODDS IN THE PAST... BUT SHE'S DONE ME A GREAT SERVICE TODAY.
THIS... REPRESENTATIVE YOU'VE BROUGHT BACK FROM THE ALLIANCE SHOULD MAKE MY PRESENTATION TO THE HIGH CIRCLE OF ELDERS APPEAR ALL THE BETTER.


BLAST IT ALL! HE'S RIGHT... PRINCESS LEIA SHOULD BE DOING THIS, NOT ME. I'M WAY OUT OF MY DEPTH!
NO, LUKE SKYWALKER--
IN ALL THE REBEL ALLIANCE, ONLY YOU CAN FULFILL WHAT MUST BE DONE HERE.
I KNOW THIS... AS A PRIESTESS... AS A WOMAN!
AND MOVING TO A SLIDEWAY... SISTER DOMINA, JOINING THE GREETING PARTY, LEADS THE BOY FROM TATOOINE TOWARD THEIR DESTINATION.
THE TEMPLE OF THE SACRED CIRCLE...! IT IS WHERE WE WORSHIP AND ABIDE.
QUARTERS HAVE BEEN ARRANGED FOR YOU, LUKE. REST WELL. TOMORROW YOU WILL FACE THE MISH ELDERS.
SOON...
QUITE A PLACE, ARTOO... AND THAT SISTER DOMINA'S QUITE A LADY. KIND OF MAKES ME BELIEVE I CAN PULL THIS OFF...!
SHE'S BEAUTIFUL, TOO!
--ALMOST AS BEAUTIFUL AS THE PRINCESS. NOT THAT I'D FORGET LEIA... IT'S JUST THAT SOMETIMES I CAN'T FIGURE WHERE I STAND WITH HER, ESPECIALLY WHEN HAN'S AROUND...
TURN IT OFF, THREEPIO! OBVIOUSLY GENERAL DODONNA DIDN'T TELL LUKE ABOUT THE LASERWAVE LINK WITH ARTOO...! PROBABLY SO WE COULD AID HIM--
--WITHOUT ANY... ER... EMBARRASSMENT.


NIGHT FALLS ON THE PLANET OF MONASTERY: A SHOWER OF MOONS, PART OF THE PLANET'S GREAT RING, GLOW LUSHLY. ONE BY ONE THE TEMPLE LIGHTS DIM... EXCEPT IN A TOWER ROOM.
YOU USED THE FORCE TO MAKE THAT NIGHTSHRIKE ATTACK, LORD VADER... IT WILL IMPRESS THE MORE SUPERSTITIOUS OF OUR FOLLOWERS.
BUT WEREN'T YOU AFRAID YOUNG SKYWALKER WOULD EXPOSE IT...? MY INSTINCTS AS A PRIESTESS TELL ME HE, TOO, IS FAMILIAR WITH THE FORCE.
TRUE, BUT HE IS STILL A NOVICE. WORSE YET... HE IS A ROMANTIC. YOUR OVERTURES TO HIM PLAY ON THAT... IT CONFUSES HIS THOUGHTS AND ULTIMATELY, HIS ABILITIES.
STRANGE. MY FAMILY PLACED ME IN THE ORDER SO I COULD MAINTAIN MY INNOCENCE... BE FREE OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE'S MANY INTRIGUES.
YET HERE I AM, DEEP IN AN INTRIGUE OF MY OWN... READY TO BETRAY THE ORDER.
TO AVENGE THE DEATH OF TWO BROTHERS.. INCLUDING THE ONE YOU LOVED MOST. SUCH DESIRES OFTEN OVERWHELM EVERYTHING ELSE--
--PARTICULARLY IN A LONG, PROUD LINE LIKE YOURS.
YES. WHY ELSE WOULD I HAVE ALLIED MYSELF WITH THE MAN MY BROTHER, BARON TAGGE, HATED?
BUT FOR ALL YOU DID AGAINST ORMAN, YOU WEREN'T RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS DEATH... LUKE SKYWALKER WAS!
THE LORD OF THE SITH LEAVES THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF TAGGE, STRIDING SWIFTLY TO A BALCONY WHERE HE CAN BE ALONE.
MY OPENING MOVES ARE COMPLETE, WERMIS... THE PLAYERS ARE ALL IN POSITION.
LET THE GAME TRULY BEGIN!

NEXT ISSUE: RED QUEEN RISING!

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THIS TIME THE FORCE IS AGAINST LUKE!
RED QUEEN RISING!
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THE MILLENNIUM FALCON FLOATS IN WIDE ORBIT AROUND A RINGED WORLD CALLED ATONASTERY. AND TO HAN SOLO'S DISMAY... IT NO LONGER DOES THIS ALONE!

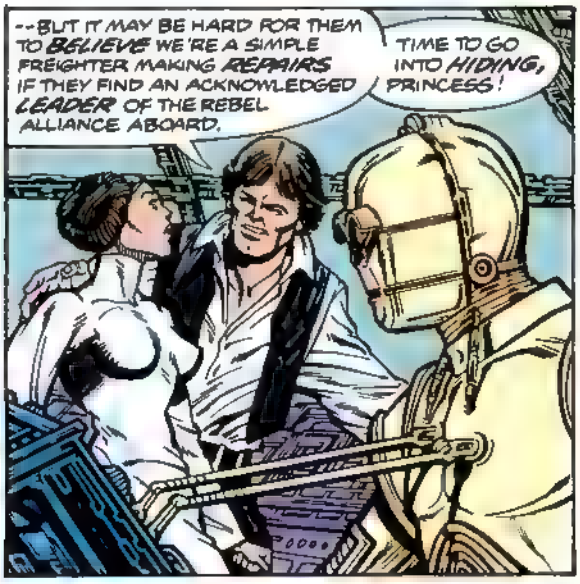
ATTENTION, FREIGHTER! STAND BY FOR IMPERIAL INSPECTION!

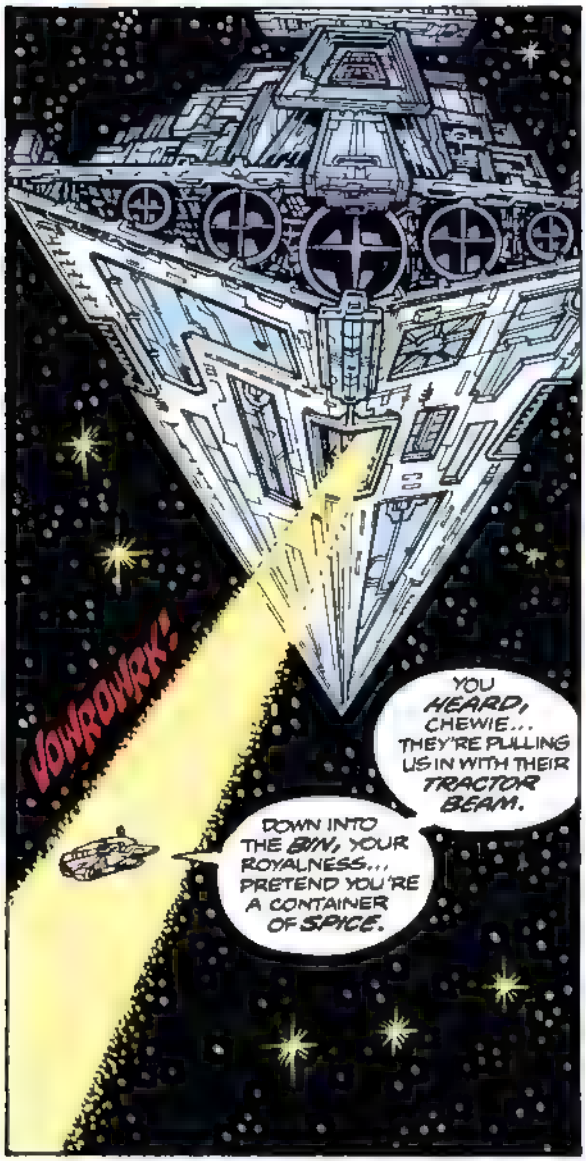
WELL, KIDS IT'S NICE TO KNOW OUR SCANNERS ARE WORKING PERFECTLY--

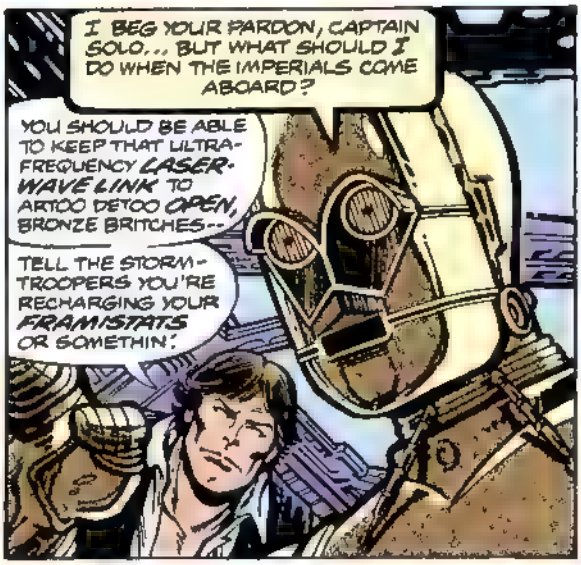
--THIS MAKES IT PRETTY DEFINITE THAT ONE OF THE EMPIRE'S BATTLE CRUISERS IS MOVING IN ON US!

Red Queen Rising!

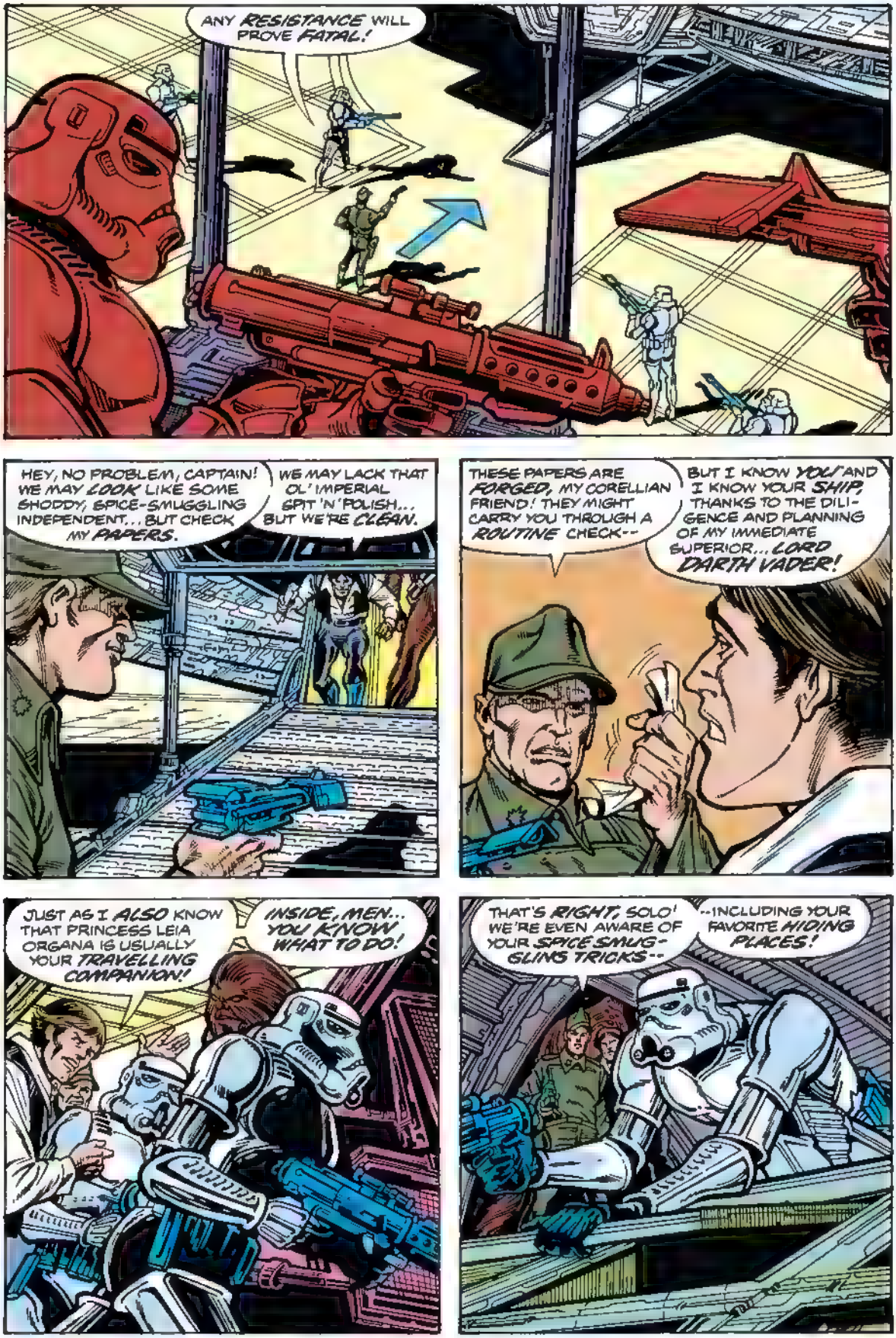
YOU KNOW WE COULDN'T TAKE FLIGHT... NOT WHEN OUR MISSION IS TO BE LONG RANGE BACK-UP FOR LUKE WHILE HE'S DOWN ON THAT PLANET.
YEAH, I KNOW. THAT DOESN'T MEAN I HAVE TO BE HAPPY ABOUT IT.
OUR ONLY HOPE NOW IS THAT THEY BUY OUR COVER STORY--

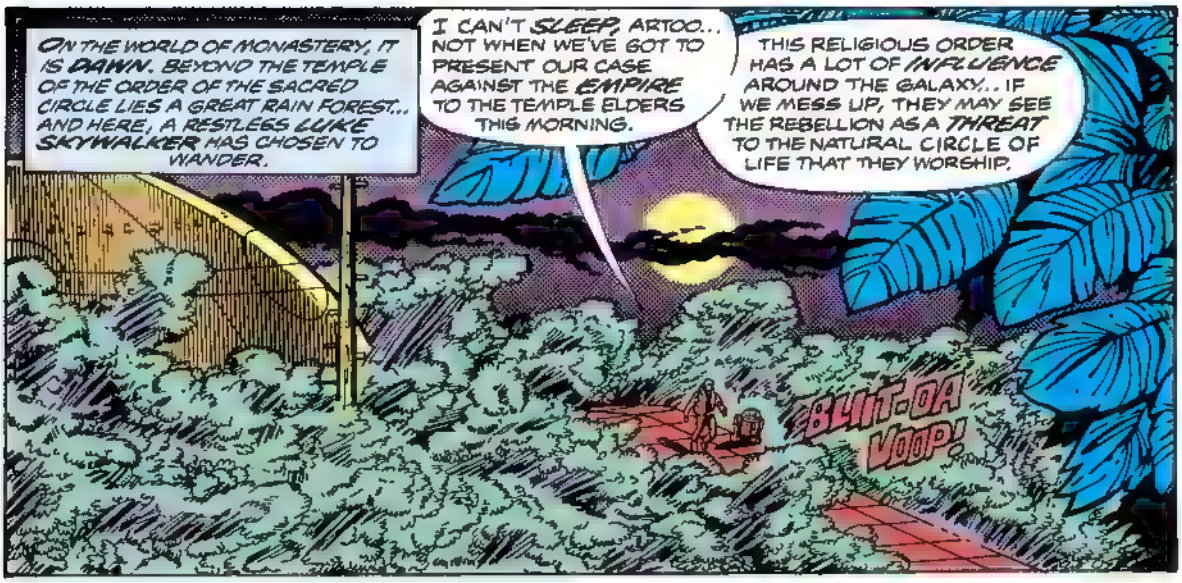

--BUT IT MAY BE HARD FOR THEM TO BELIEVE WE'RE A SIMPLE FREIGHTER MAKING REPAIRS IF THEY FIND AN ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE ABOARD.
TIME TO GO INTO HIDING, PRINCESS!

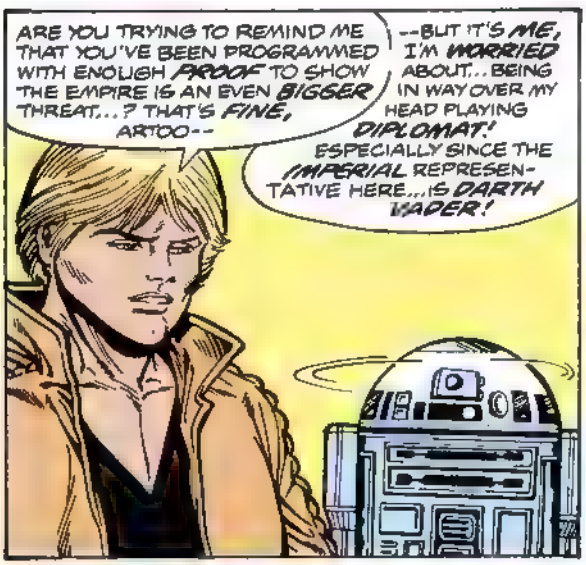

VOWROWRK!
YOU HEARD, CHEWIE... THEY'RE PULLING US IN WITH THEIR TRACTOR BEAM.
DOWN INTO THE BIN, YOUR ROYALNESS... PRETEND YOU'RE A CONTAINER OF SPICE.

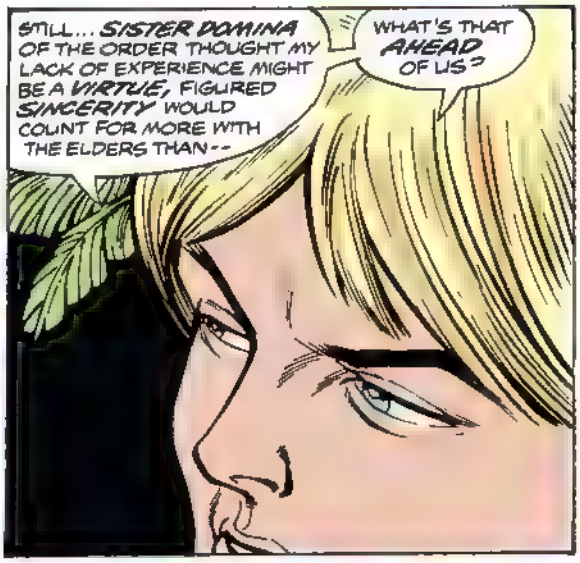

I BEG YOUR PARDON, CAPTAIN SOLO... BUT WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN THE IMPERIALS COME ABOARD?
YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO KEEP THAT ULTRA-FREQUENCY LASER-WAVE LINK TO ARTOO DETOO OPEN, BRONZE BRITCHES--
TELL THE STORM-TROOPERS YOU'RE RECHARGING YOUR FRAMISTATS OR SOMETHIN'.

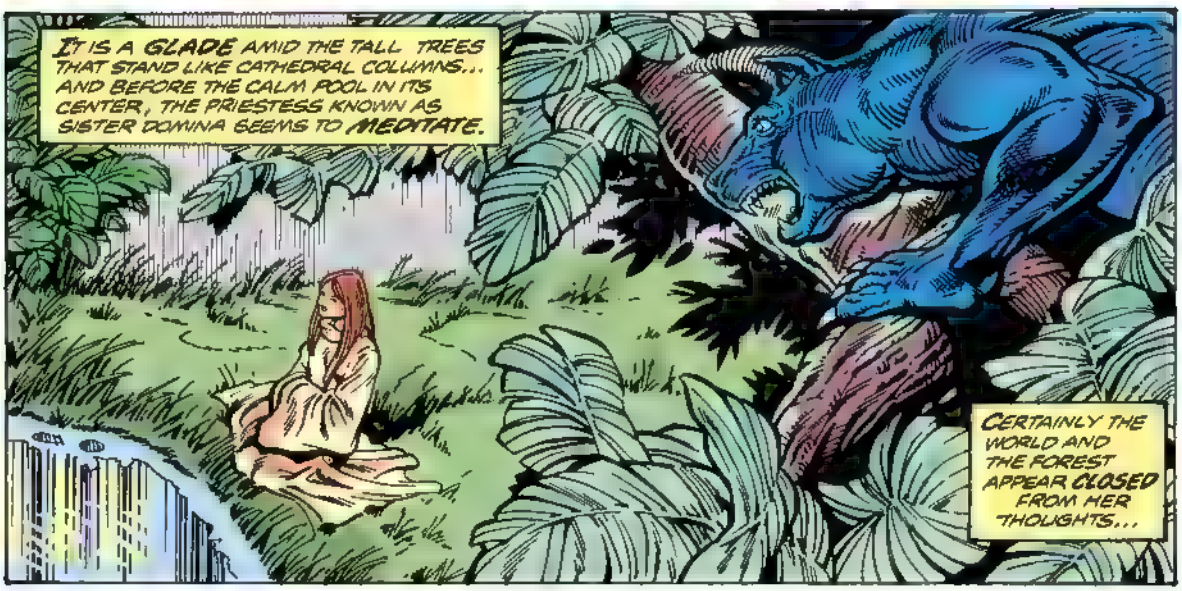
BE BOLD... BE CREATIVE! YOU KNOW... LIE!
THIS IS IMPERIAL CAPTAIN WERMIS, FREIGHTER. LOWER YOUR RAMP AND STAND READY TO BE BOARDED--

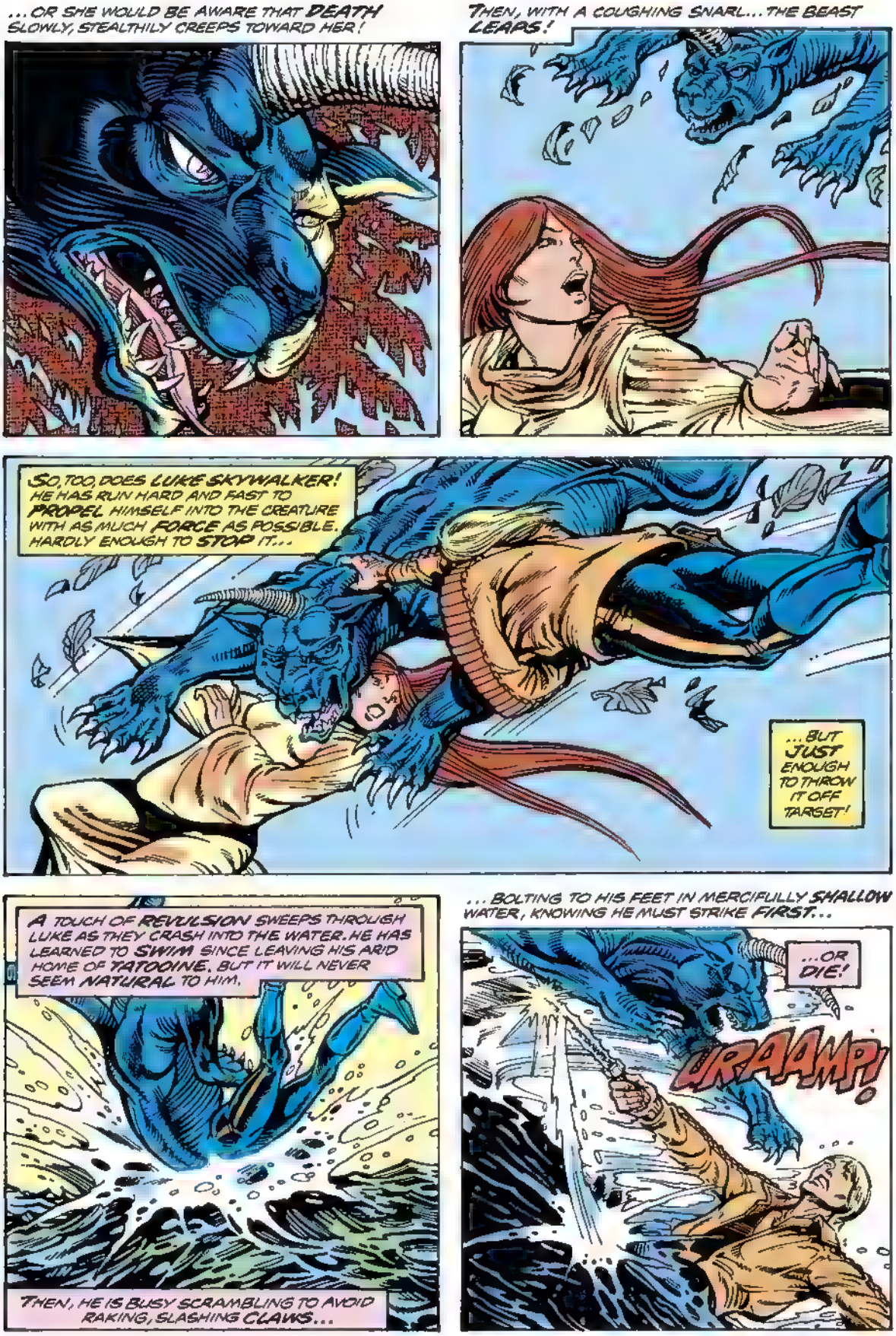

ANY RESISTANCE WILL PROVE FATAL!
HEY, NO PROBLEM, CAPTAIN! WE MAY LOOK LIKE SOME SHODDY, SPICE-SMUGGLING INDEPENDENT... BUT CHECK MY PAPERS.
WE MAY LACK THAT OL' IMPERIAL SPIT 'N' POLISH... BUT WE'RE CLEAN.
THESE PAPERS ARE FORGED, MY CORELLIAN FRIEND! THEY MIGHT CARRY YOU THROUGH A ROUTINE CHECK--
BUT I KNOW YOU! AND I KNOW YOUR SHIP, THANKS TO THE DILIGENCE AND PLANNING OF MY IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR... LORD DARTH VADER!
JUST AS I ALSO KNOW THAT PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA IS USUALLY YOUR TRAVELLING COMPANION!
INSIDE, MEN... YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO!
THAT'S RIGHT, SOLO! WE'RE EVEN AWARE OF YOUR SPICE SMUGGLING TRICKS--
--INCLUDING YOUR FAVORITE HIDING PLACES!

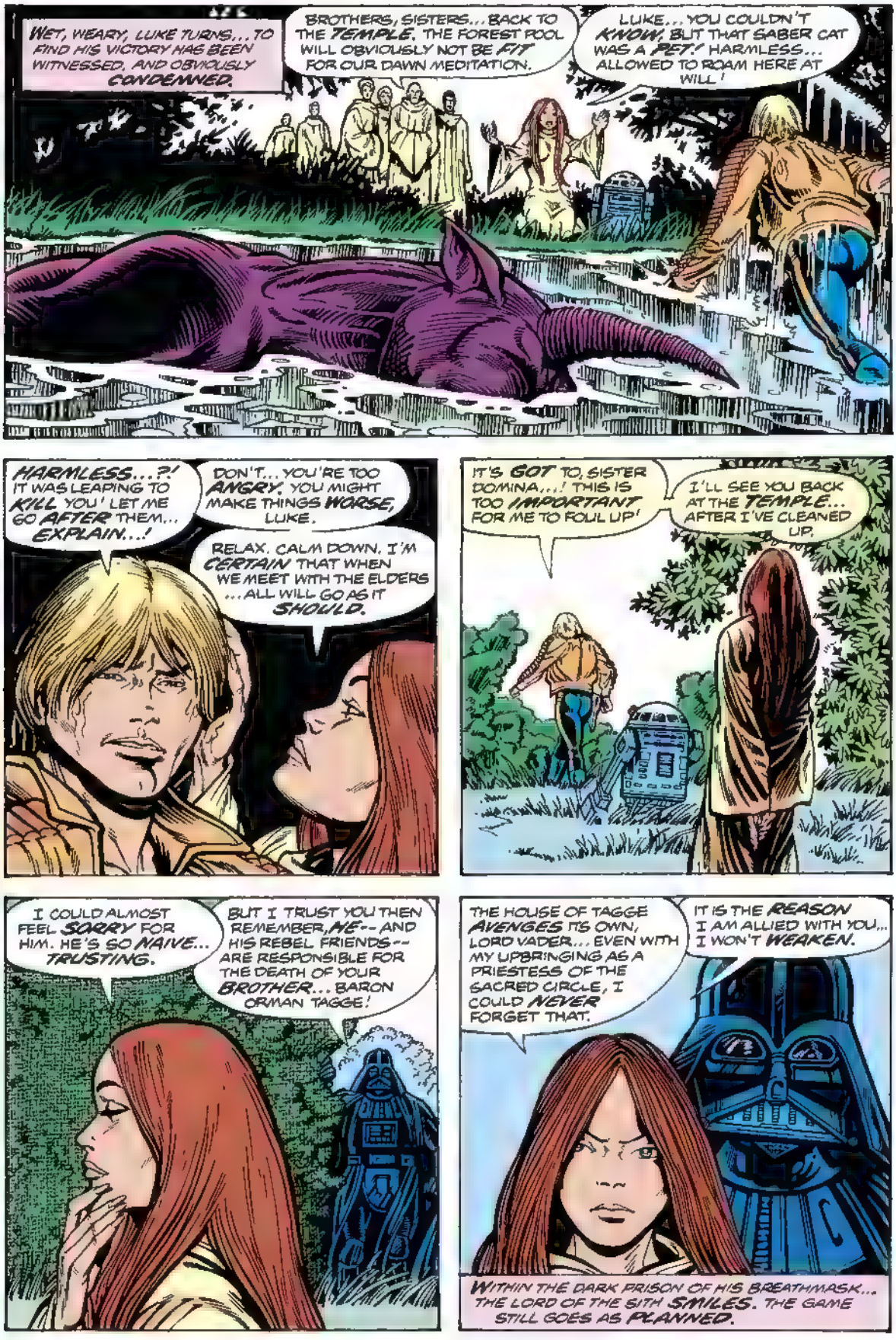

ON THE WORLD OF MONASTERY, IT IS DAWN. BEYOND THE TEMPLE OF THE ORDER OF THE SACRED CIRCLE LIES A GREAT RAIN FOREST... AND HERE, A RESTLESS LUKE SKYWALKER HAS CHOSEN TO WANDER.
I CAN'T SLEEP, ARTOO... NOT WHEN WE'VE GOT TO PRESENT OUR CASE AGAINST THE EMPIRE TO THE TEMPLE ELDERS THIS MORNING.
THIS RELIGIOUS ORDER HAS A LOT OF INFLUENCE AROUND THE GALAXY... IF WE MESS UP, THEY MAY SEE THE REBELLION AS A THREAT TO THE NATURAL CIRCLE OF LIFE THAT THEY WORSHIP.
BLIT-DA VOOP!

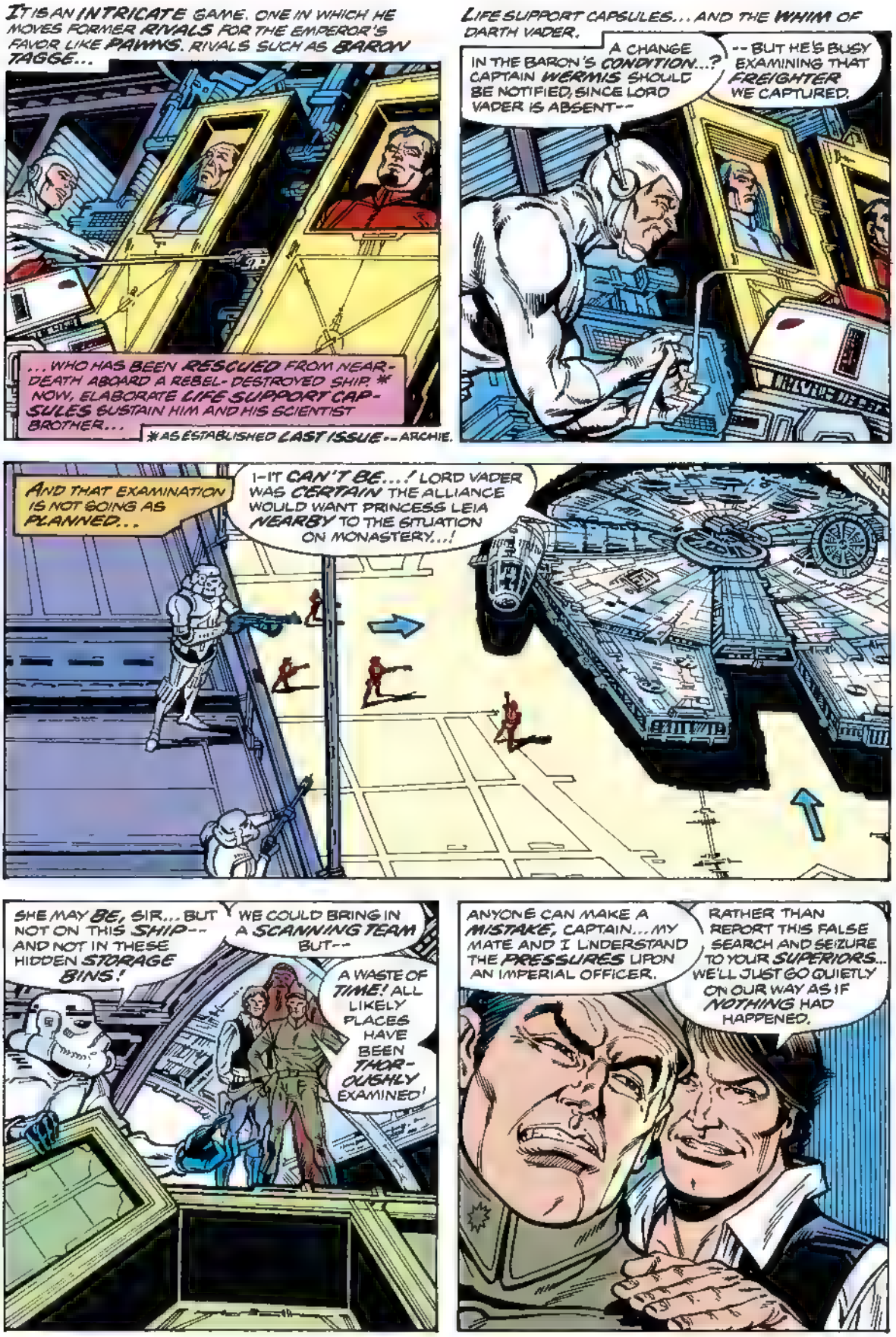

ARE YOU TRYING TO REMIND ME THAT YOU'VE BEEN PROGRAMMED WITH ENOUGH PROOF TO SHOW THE EMPIRE IS AN EVEN BIGGER THREAT...? THAT'S FINE, ARTOO--
--BUT IT'S ME, I'M WORRIED ABOUT... BEING IN WAY OVER MY HEAD PLAYING DIPLOMAT! ESPECIALLY SINCE THE IMPERIAL REPRESENTATIVE HERE... IS DARTH VADER!


STILL... SISTER DOMINA OF THE ORDER THOUGHT MY LACK OF EXPERIENCE MIGHT BE A VIRTUE, FIGURED SINCERITY WOULD COUNT FOR MORE WITH THE ELDERS THAN--
WHAT'S THAT AHEAD OF US?

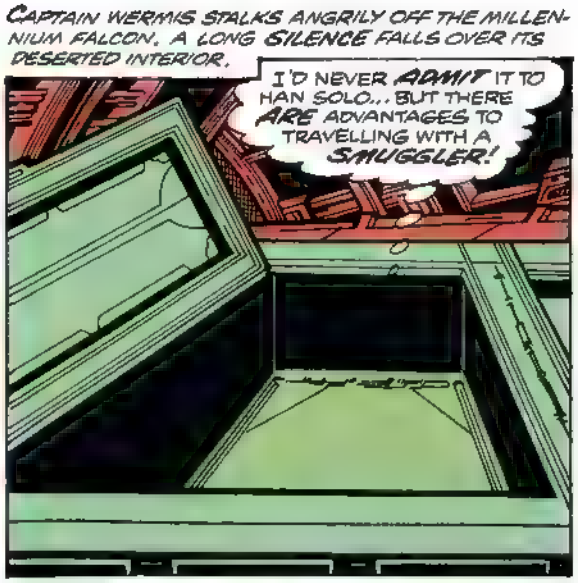

IT IS A GLADE AMID THE TALL TREES THAT STAND LIKE CATHEDRAL COLUMNS... AND BEFORE THE CALM POOL IN ITS CENTER, THE PRIESTESS KNOWN AS SISTER DOMINA SEEMS TO MEDITATE.
CERTAINLY THE WORLD AND THE FOREST APPEAR CLOSED FROM HER THOUGHTS...


...OR SHE WOULD BE AWARE THAT DEATH SLOWLY, STEALTHILY CREEPS TOWARD HER!
THEN, WITH A COUGHING SNARL... THE BEAST LEAPS!
SO, TOO, DOES LUKE SKYWALKER! HE HAS RUN HARD AND FAST TO PROPEL HIMSELF INTO THE CREATURE WITH AS MUCH FORCE AS POSSIBLE. HARDLY ENOUGH TO STOP IT...
...BUT JUST ENOUGH TO THROW IT OFF TARGET!
A TOUCH OF REVULSION SWEEPS THROUGH LUKE AS THEY CRASH INTO THE WATER. HE HAS LEARNED TO SWIM SINCE LEAVING HIS ARID HOME OF TATOOINE, BUT IT WILL NEVER SEEM NATURAL TO HIM.
THEN, HE IS BUSY SCRAMBLING TO AVOID RAKING, SLASHING CLAWS...
...BOLTING TO HIS FEET IN MERCIFULLY SHALLOW WATER, KNOWING HE MUST STRIKE FIRST...
...OR DIE!
RAAAMP!

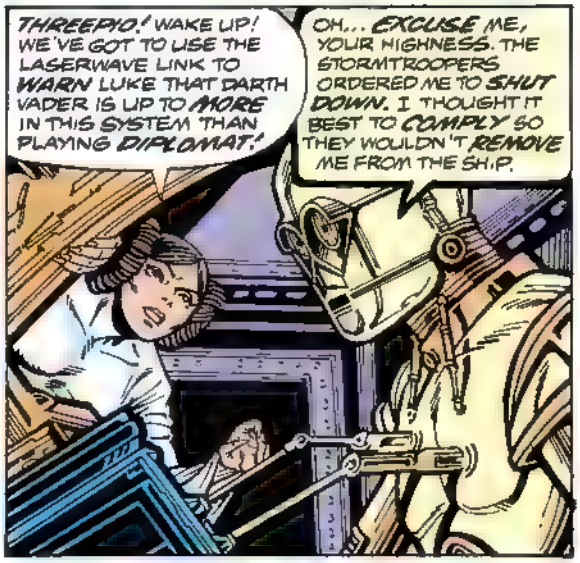

WET, WEARY, LUKE TURNS... TO FIND HIS VICTORY HAS BEEN WITNESSED, AND OBVIOUSLY CONDEMNED.
BROTHERS, SISTERS... BACK TO THE TEMPLE. THE FOREST POOL WILL OBVIOUSLY NOT BE FIT FOR OUR DAWN MEDITATION.
LUKE... YOU COULDN'T KNOW, BUT THAT SABER CAT WAS A PET.' HARMLESS... ALLOWED TO ROAM HERE AT WILL!
HARMLESS...?! IT WAS LEAPING TO KILL YOU! LET ME GO AFTER THEM... EXPLAIN...!
DON'T... YOU'RE TOO ANGRY. YOU MIGHT MAKE THINGS WORSE, LUKE.
RELAX. CALM DOWN. I'M CERTAIN THAT WHEN WE MEET WITH THE ELDERS ...ALL WILL GO AS IT SHOULD.
IT'S GOT TO, SISTER DOMINA...! THIS IS TOO IMPORTANT FOR ME TO FOUL UP!
I'LL SEE YOU BACK AT THE TEMPLE... AFTER I'VE CLEANED UP.
I COULD ALMOST FEEL SORRY FOR HIM. HE'S SO NAIVE... TRUSTING.
BUT I TRUST YOU THEN REMEMBER, ME-- AND HIS REBEL FRIENDS-- ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF YOUR BROTHER... BARON ORMAN TAGGE!
THE HOUSE OF TAGGE AVENGES ITS OWN, LORD VADER... EVEN WITH MY UPBRINGING AS A PRIESTESS OF THE SACRED CIRCLE, I COULD NEVER FORGET THAT.
IT IS THE REASON I AM ALLIED WITH YOU... I WON'T WEAKEN.
WITHIN THE DARK PRISON OF HIS BREATHMASK... THE LORD OF THE SITH SMILES. THE GAME STILL GOES AS PLANNED.

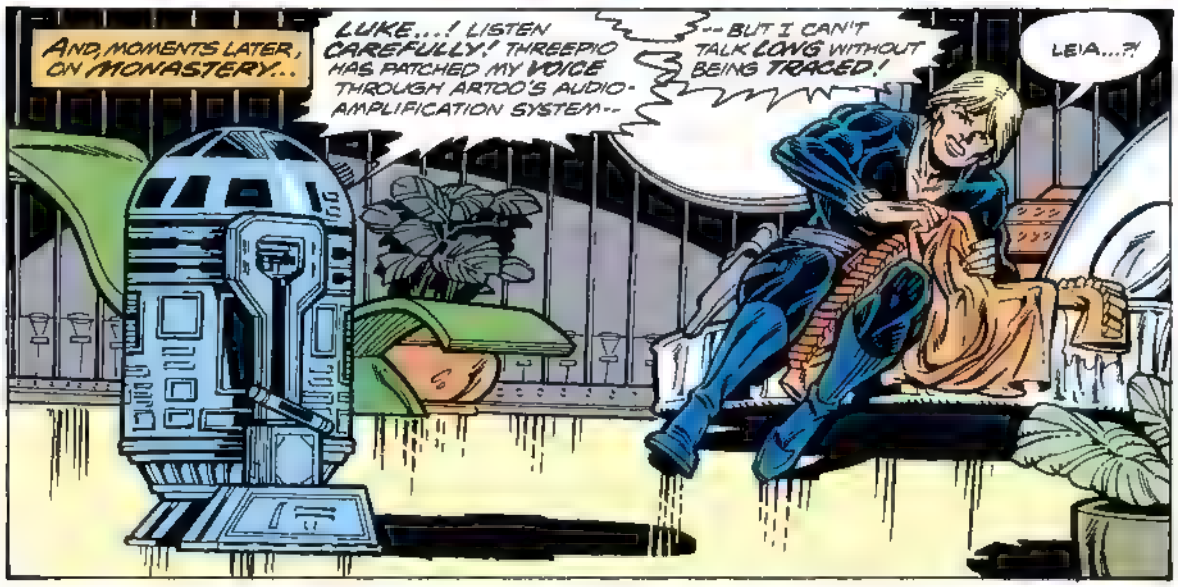

IT IS AN INTRICATE GAME, ONE IN WHICH HE MOVES FORMER RIVALS FOR THE EMPEROR'S FAVOR LIKE PAWNS. RIVALS SUCH AS BARON TAGGE...
...WHO HAS BEEN RESCUED FROM NEAR-DEATH ABOARD A REBEL-DESTROYED SHIP. * NOW, ELABORATE LIFE SUPPORT CAPSULES SUSTAIN HIM AND HIS SCIENTIST BROTHER...
*AS ESTABLISHED LAST ISSUE--ARCHIE.
LIFE SUPPORT CAPSULES... AND THE WHIM OF DARTH VADER.
A CHANGE IN THE BARON'S CONDITION...? CAPTAIN WERMIS SHOULD BE NOTIFIED, SINCE LORD VADER IS ABSENT--
--BUT HE'S BUSY EXAMINING THAT FREIGHTER WE CAPTURED.
AND THAT EXAMINATION IS NOT GOING AS PLANNED...
I-IT CAN'T BE...! LORD VADER WAS CERTAIN THE ALLIANCE WOULD WANT PRINCESS LEIA NEARBY TO THE SITUATION ON MONASTERY...!
SHE MAY BE, SIR... BUT NOT ON THIS SHIP-- AND NOT IN THESE HIDDEN STORAGE BINS!
WE COULD BRING IN A SCANNING TEAM BUT--
A WASTE OF TIME! ALL LIKELY PLACES HAVE BEEN THOROUGHLY EXAMINED!
ANYONE CAN MAKE A MISTAKE, CAPTAIN... MY MATE AND I UNDERSTAND THE PRESSURES UPON AN IMPERIAL OFFICER.
RATHER THAN REPORT THIS FALSE SEARCH AND SEIZURE TO YOUR SUPERIORS... WE'LL JUST GO QUIETLY ON OUR WAY AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.

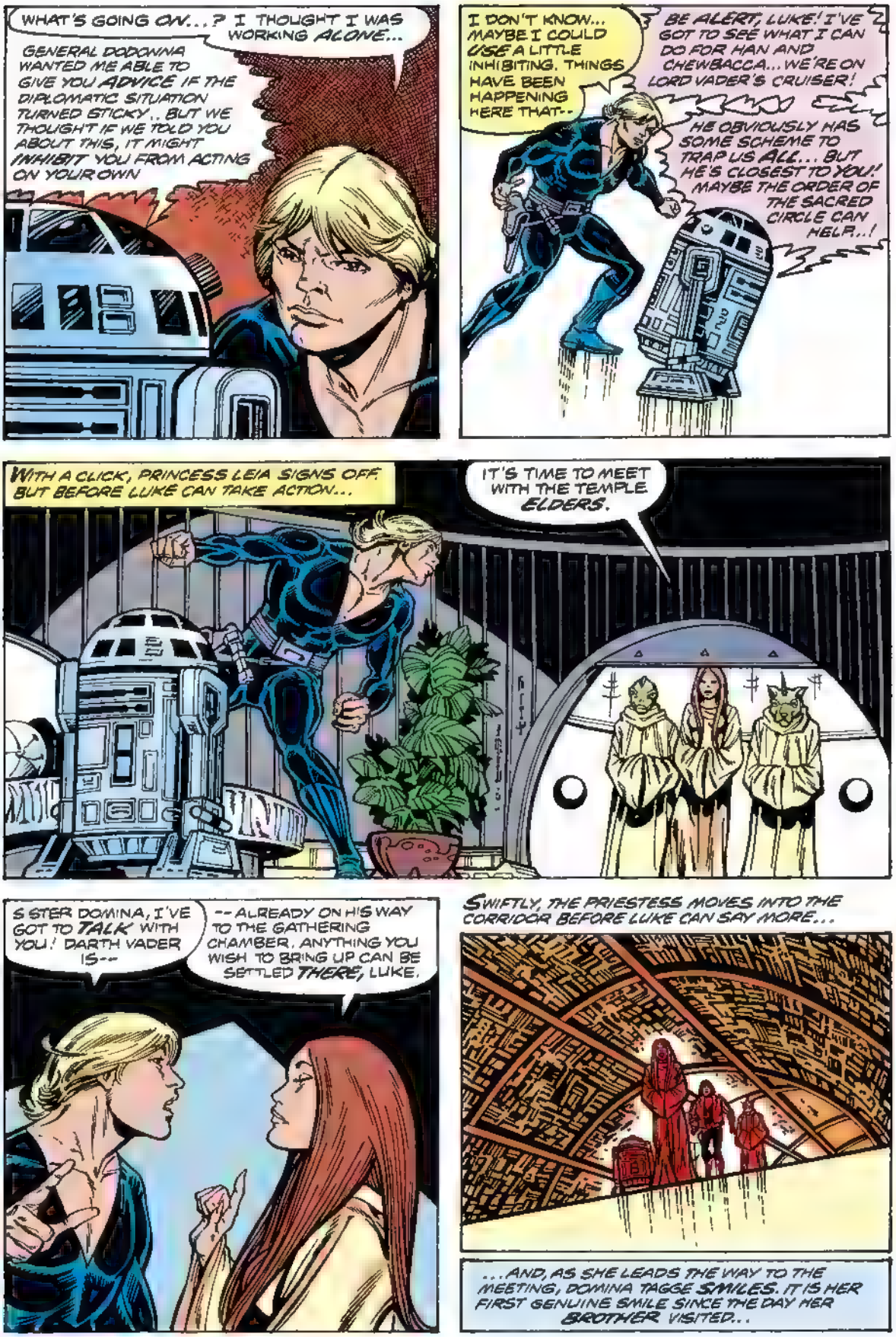
THE ONLY PLACE YOU AND THAT MOUNTAIN OF FUR ARE GOING, CORELLIAN,...IS TO A DETENTION CELL!
TAKE THEM AWAY! TELL THE OTHER GUARDS IN THE BAY TO GET BACK TO THEIR REGULAR DUTIES... LORD VADER WILL DEAL WITH THIS PAIR WHEN HE RETURNS!


CAPTAIN WERMIS STALKS ANGRILY OFF THE MILLENNIUM FALCON. A LONG SILENCE FALLS OVER ITS DESERTED INTERIOR.
I'D NEVER ADMIT IT TO HAN SOLO... BUT THERE ARE ADVANTAGES TO TRAVELLING WITH A SMUGGLER!

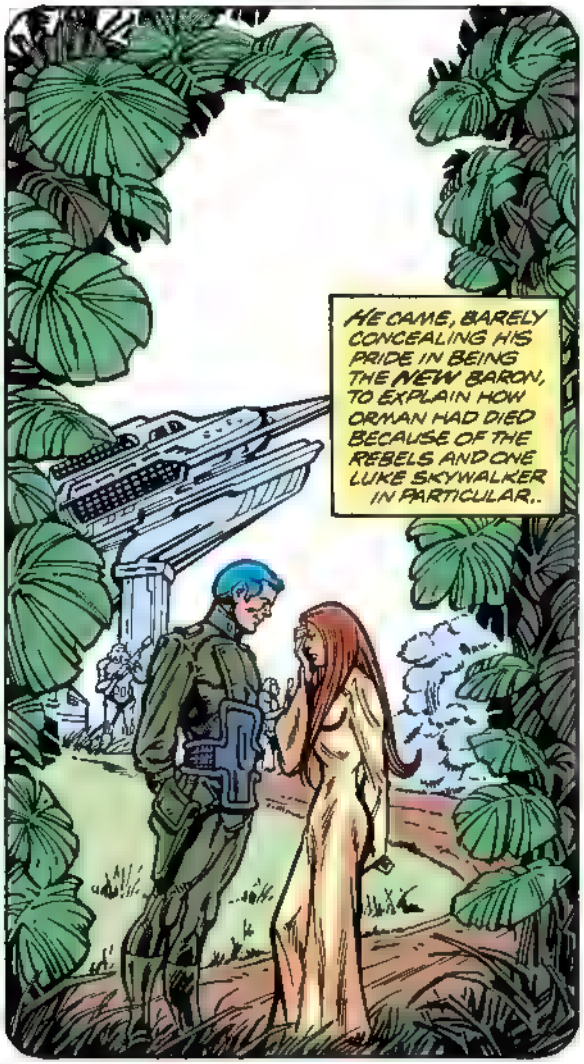
CERTAINLY HIS INSTINCTS WERE RIGHT THIS TIME! SINCE HE'D USED THESE SECRET BINS ONCE AGAINST THE EMPIRE--*
--HE INSISTED ON HAVING ALLIANCE TECHNOS PUT IN THESE FALSE BOTTOMS JUST IN CASE THE IMPERIALS HAD CAUGHT ON TO THE ORIGINAL TRICK!
* ANYONE WHO DOESN'T REMEMBER THAT SCENE FROM THE MOVIE, TURN IN YOUR LIGHTSABER--A G


THREEPIO! WAKE UP! WE'VE GOT TO USE THE LASERWAVE LINK TO WARN LUKE THAT DARTH VADER IS UP TO MORE IN THIS SYSTEM THAN PLAYING DIPLOMAT!
OH... EXCUSE ME, YOUR HIGHNESS. THE STORMTROOPERS ORDERED ME TO SHUT DOWN. I THOUGHT IT BEST TO COMPLY SO THEY WOULDN'T REMOVE ME FROM THE SHIP.

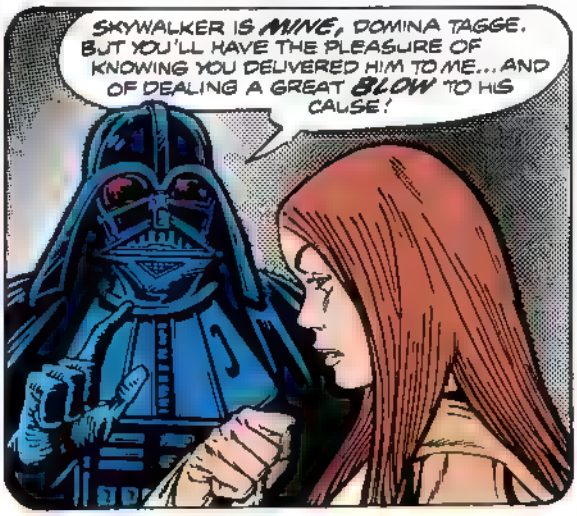

AND, MOMENTS LATER, ON MONASTERY...
LUKE...! LISTEN CAREFULLY! THREEPIO HAS PATCHED MY VOICE THROUGH ARTOO'S AUDIO-AMPLIFICATION SYSTEM--
--BUT I CAN'T TALK LONG WITHOUT BEING TRACED!
LEIA...?


WHAT'S GOING ON...? I THOUGHT I WAS WORKING ALONE...
GENERAL DODONNA WANTED ME ABLE TO GIVE YOU ADVICE IF THE DIPLOMATIC SITUATION TURNED STICKY.. BUT WE THOUGHT IF WE TOLD YOU ABOUT THIS, IT MIGHT INHIBIT YOU FROM ACTING ON YOUR OWN
I DON'T KNOW... MAYBE I COULD USE A LITTLE INHIBITING. THINGS HAVE BEEN HAPPENING HERE THAT--
BE ALERT, LUKE! I'VE GOT TO SEE WHAT I CAN DO FOR HAN AND CHEWBACCA... WE'RE ON LORD VADER'S CRUISER!
HE OBVIOUSLY HAS SOME SCHEME TO TRAP US ALL... BUT HE'S CLOSEST TO YOU! MAYBE THE ORDER OF THE SACRED CIRCLE CAN HELP..!
WITH A CLICK, PRINCESS LEIA SIGNS OFF. BUT BEFORE LUKE CAN TAKE ACTION...
IT'S TIME TO MEET WITH THE TEMPLE ELDERS.
SISTER DOMINA, I'VE GOT TO TALK WITH YOU! DARTH VADER IS--
-- ALREADY ON HIS WAY TO THE GATHERING CHAMBER. ANYTHING YOU WISH TO BRING UP CAN BE SETTLED THERE, LUKE.
SWIFTLY, THE PRIESTESS MOVES INTO THE CORRIDOR BEFORE LUKE CAN SAY MORE...
...AND, AS SHE LEADS THE WAY TO THE MEETING, DOMINA TAGGE SMILES. IT IS HER FIRST GENUINE SMILE SINCE THE DAY HER BROTHER VISITED...

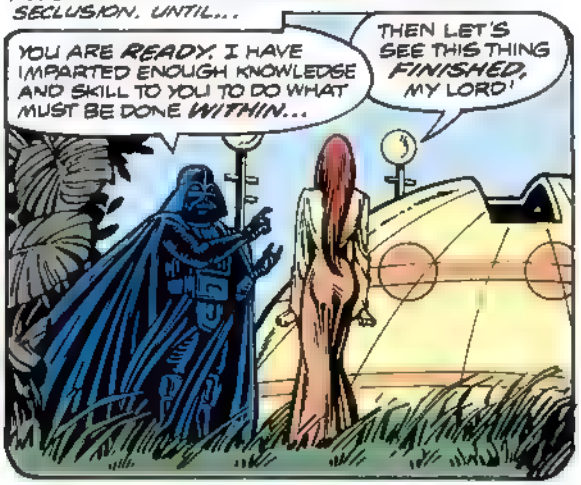
... HER YOUNGEST BROTHER, ULRIC, THE IMPERIAL GENERAL. HE CAME IN PLACE OF THE ONE BROTHER DOMINA TRULY LOVED: THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY... **BARON ORMAN TAGGE.**


HE CAME, BARELY CONCEALING HIS PRIDE IN BEING THE NEW BARON, TO EXPLAIN HOW ORMAN HAD DIED BECAUSE OF THE REBELS AND ONE LUKE SKYWALKER IN PARTICULAR..

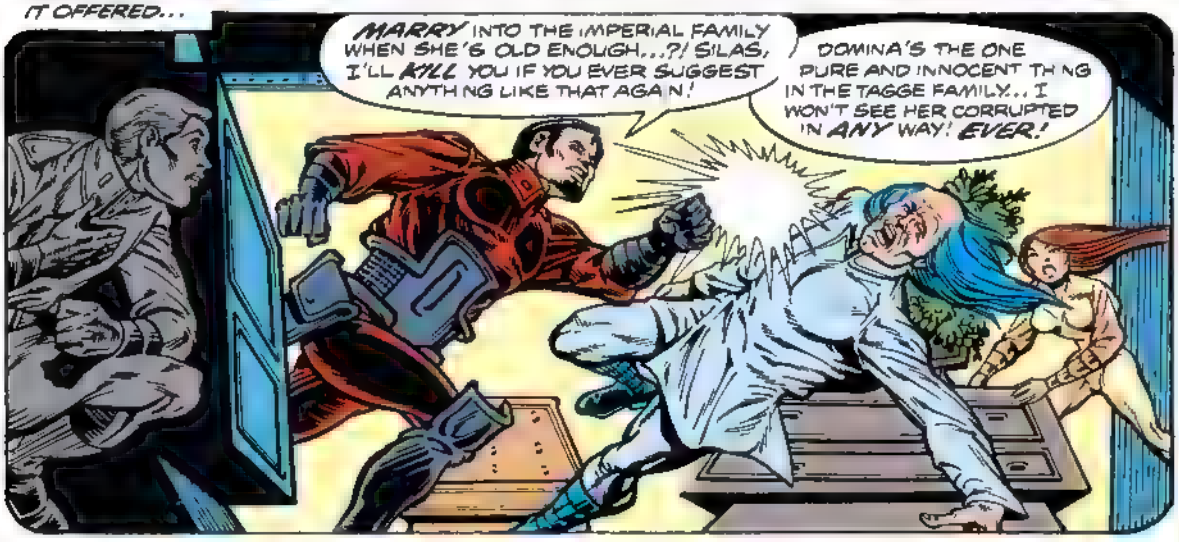
..AND TO SUGGEST THAT IF **RETRIBUTION** INTERESTED HER, THE BEST HOPE WAS TO MAKE **PEACE** WITH THE LORD OF THE SITH.

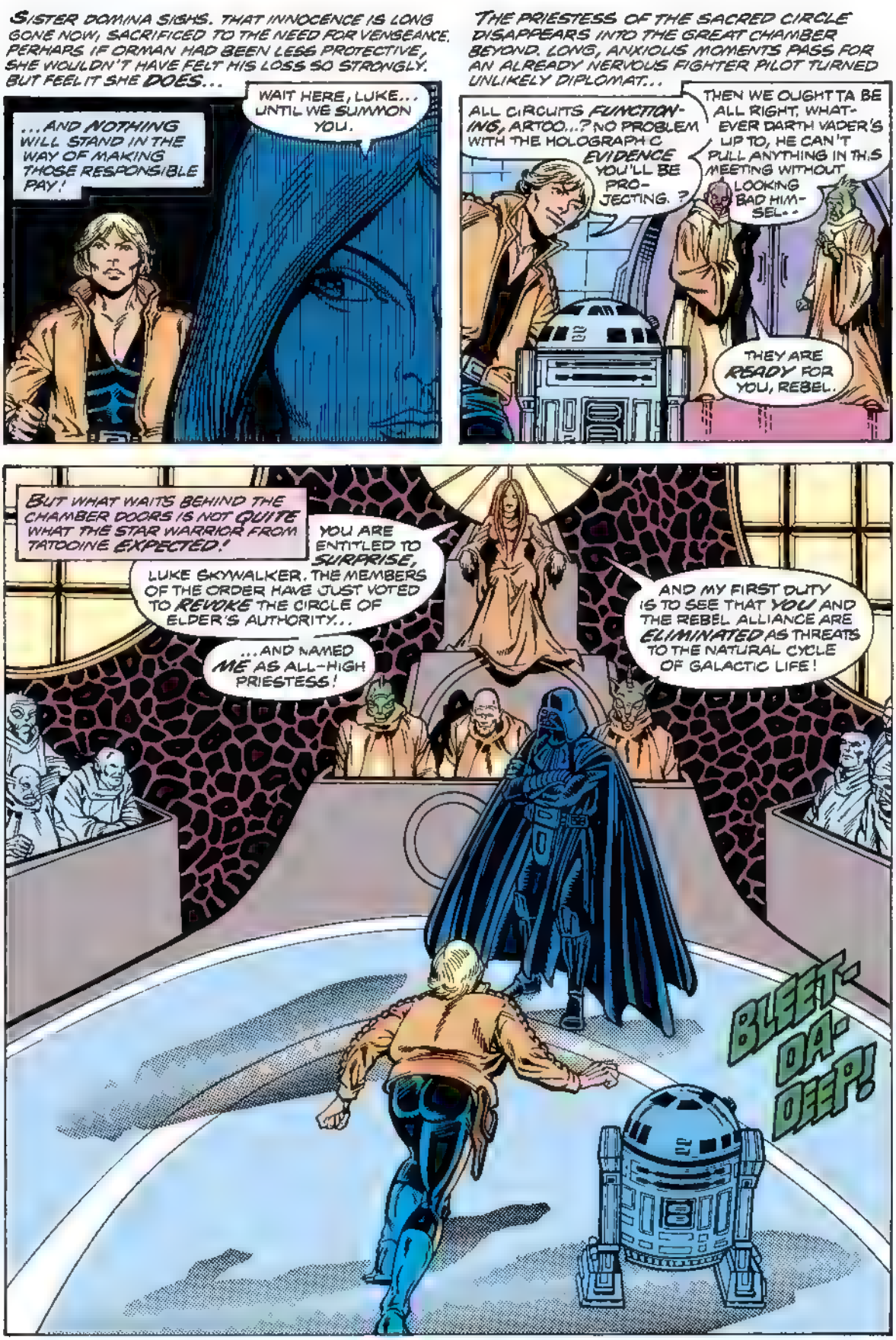

SKYWALKER IS MINE, DOMINA TAGGE. BUT YOU'LL HAVE THE PLEASURE OF KNOWING YOU DELIVERED HIM TO ME... AND OF DEALING A GREAT BLOW TO HIS CAUSE!

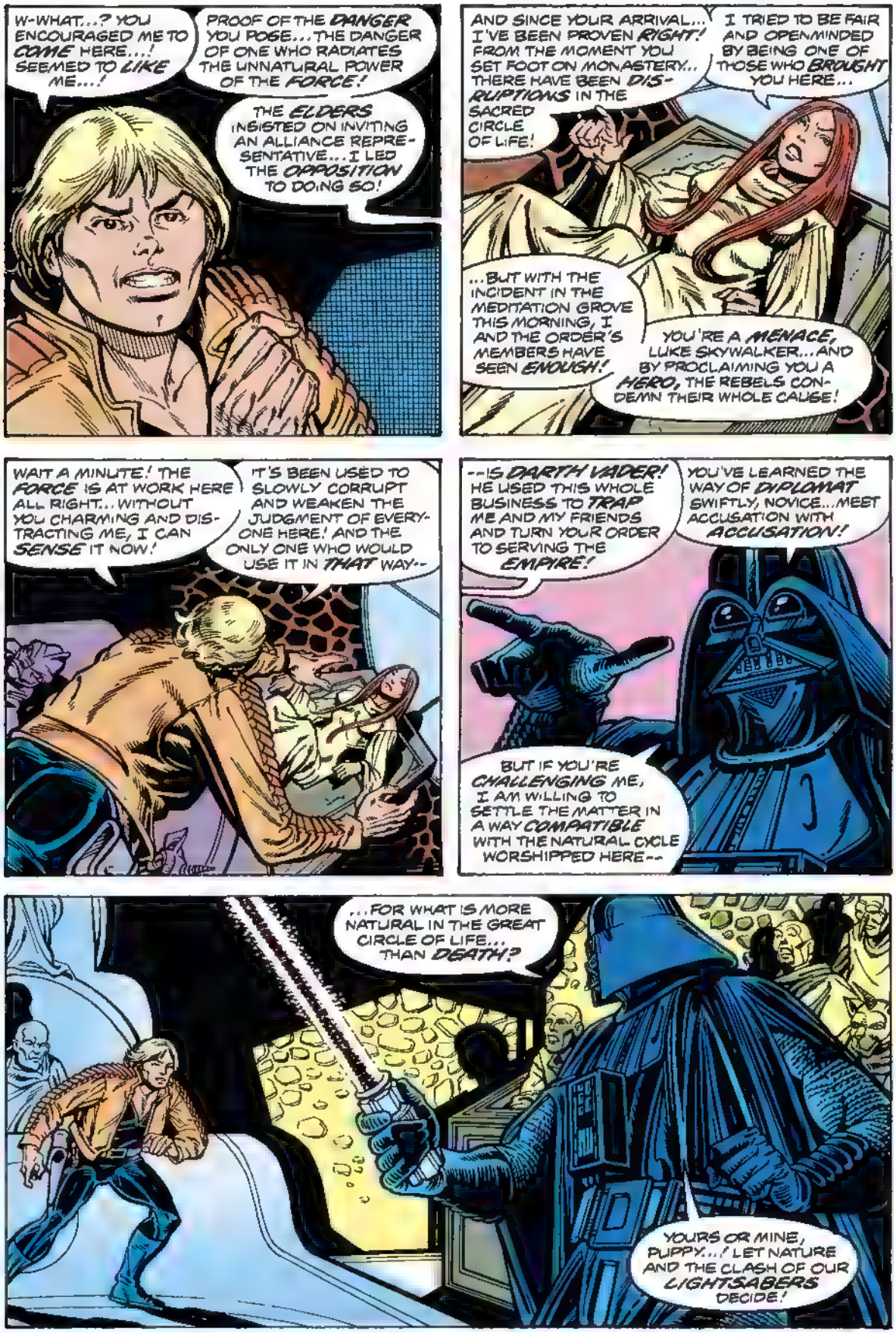
IT WASN'T AS MUCH AS SHE WOULD HAVE LIKED... BUT IT WAS ENOUGH. NOW DARTH VADER BECAME THE ONE REGULAR VISITOR SHE WAS ALLOWED IN THE MONASTERY'S CLOISTERED SECLUSION. UNTIL...

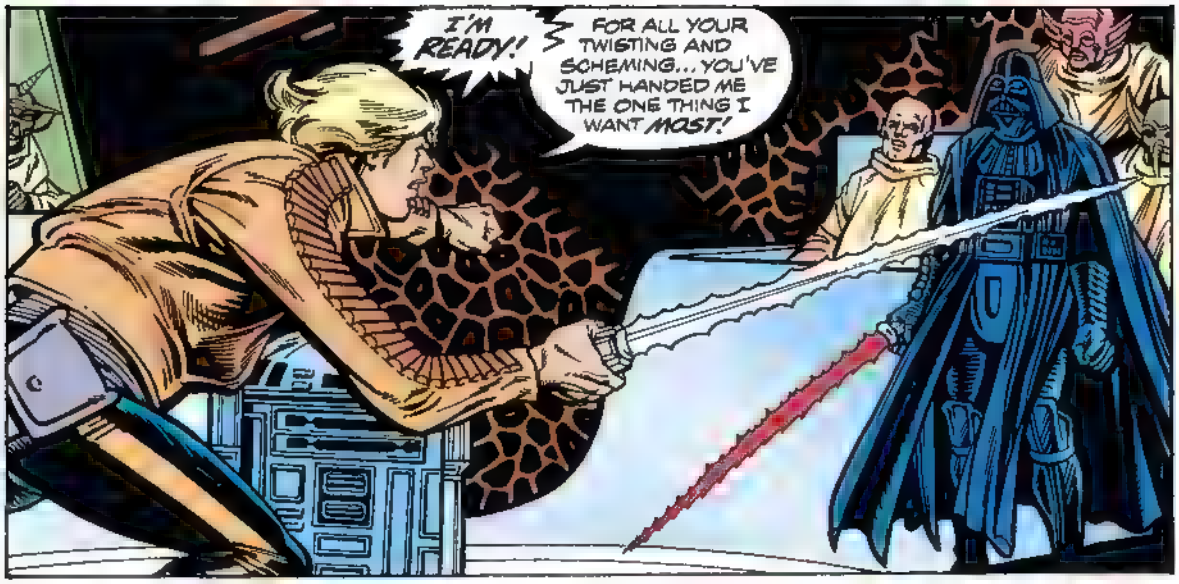

YOU ARE READY. I HAVE IMPARTED ENOUGH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL TO YOU TO DO WHAT MUST BE DONE WITHIN...
THEN LET'S SEE THIS THING FINISHED, MY LORD!

AND ONLY IN WEAKER MOMENTS WOULD SHE RECALL AN INCIDENT FROM LONG, LONG AGO, BEFORE SHE ENTERED THE ORDER OF THE SACRED CIRCLE AND THE PROTECTED EXISTENCE IT OFFERED...

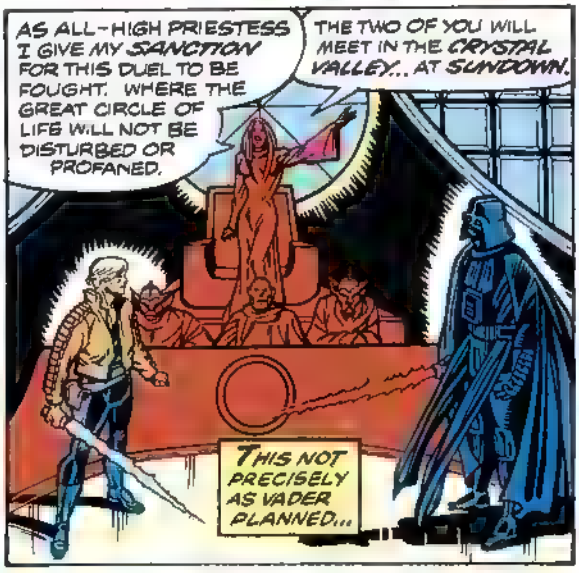

MARRY INTO THE IMPERIAL FAMILY WHEN SHE'S OLD ENOUGH...?! SILAS, I'LL KILL YOU IF YOU EVER SUGGEST ANYTHING LIKE THAT AGAIN!
DOMINA'S THE ONE PURE AND INNOCENT THING IN THE TAGGE FAMILY... I WON'T SEE HER CORRUPTED IN ANY WAY! EVER!


SISTER DOMINA SIGHS. THAT INNOCENCE IS LONG GONE NOW, SACRIFICED TO THE NEED FOR VENGEANCE. PERHAPS IF ORMAN HAD BEEN LESS PROTECTIVE, SHE WOULDN'T HAVE FELT HIS LOSS SO STRONGLY. BUT FEEL IT SHE DOES...
...AND NOTHING WILL STAND IN THE WAY OF MAKING THOSE RESPONSIBLE PAY!
WAIT HERE, LUKE... UNTIL WE SUMMON YOU.
THE PRIESTESS OF THE SACRED CIRCLE DISAPPEARS INTO THE GREAT CHAMBER BEYOND. LONG, ANXIOUS MOMENTS PASS FOR AN ALREADY NERVOUS FIGHTER PILOT TURNED UNLIKELY DIPLOMAT...
ALL CIRCUITS FUNCTIONING, ARTOO...? NO PROBLEM WITH THE HOLOGRAPH C EVIDENCE YOU'LL BE PROJECTING...?
THEN WE OUGHT TA BE ALL RIGHT. WHATEVER DARTH VADER'S UP TO, HE CAN'T PULL ANYTHING IN THIS MEETING WITHOUT LOOKING BAD HIMSEL--
THEY ARE READY FOR YOU, REBEL.
BUT WHAT WAITS BEHIND THE CHAMBER DOORS IS NOT QUITE WHAT THE STAR WARRIOR FROM TATOOINE EXPECTED!
YOU ARE ENTITLED TO SURPRISE, LUKE SKYWALKER. THE MEMBERS OF THE ORDER HAVE JUST VOTED TO REVOKE THE CIRCLE OF ELDER'S AUTHORITY...
...AND NAMED ME AS ALL-HIGH PRIESTESS!
AND MY FIRST DUTY IS TO SEE THAT YOU AND THE REBEL ALLIANCE ARE ELIMINATED AS THREATS TO THE NATURAL CYCLE OF GALACTIC LIFE!
BLEET-DA-DEEP!

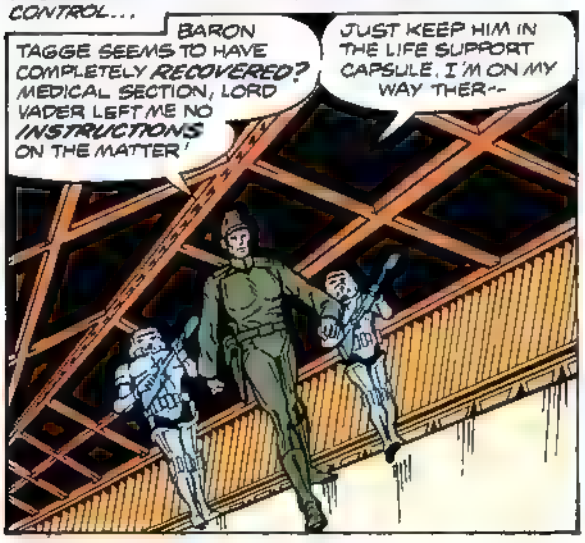

W-WHAT...? YOU ENCOURAGED ME TO COME HERE...! SEEMED TO LIKE ME...!
PROOF OF THE DANGER YOU POSE... THE DANGER OF ONE WHO RADIATES THE UNNATURAL POWER OF THE FORCE!
THE ELDERS INSISTED ON INVITING AN ALLIANCE REPRESENTATIVE... I LED THE OPPOSITION TO DOING SO!
AND SINCE YOUR ARRIVAL... I'VE BEEN PROVEN RIGHT! FROM THE MOMENT YOU SET FOOT ON MONASTERY... THERE HAVE BEEN DISRUPTIONS IN THE SACRED CIRCLE OF LIFE!
I TRIED TO BE FAIR AND OPENMINDED BY BEING ONE OF THOSE WHO BROUGHT YOU HERE...
...BUT WITH THE INCIDENT IN THE MEDITATION GROVE THIS MORNING, I AND THE ORDER'S MEMBERS HAVE SEEN ENOUGH!
YOU'RE A MENACE, LUKE SKYWALKER... AND BY PROCLAIMING YOU A HERO, THE REBELS CONDEMN THEIR WHOLE CAUSE!
WAIT A MINUTE! THE FORCE IS AT WORK HERE ALL RIGHT... WITHOUT YOU CHARMING AND DISTRACTING ME, I CAN SENSE IT NOW!
IT'S BEEN USED TO SLOWLY CORRUPT AND WEAKEN THE JUDGMENT OF EVERYONE HERE! AND THE ONLY ONE WHO WOULD USE IT IN THAT WAY--
--IS DARTH VADER! HE USED THIS WHOLE BUSINESS TO TRAP ME AND MY FRIENDS AND TURN YOUR ORDER TO SERVING THE EMPIRE!
YOU'VE LEARNED THE WAY OF DIPLOMAT SWIFTLY, NOVICE... MEET ACCUSATION WITH ACCUSATION!
BUT IF YOU'RE CHALLENGING ME, I AM WILLING TO SETTLE THE MATTER IN A WAY COMPATIBLE WITH THE NATURAL CYCLE WORSHIPPED HERE--
...FOR WHAT IS MORE NATURAL IN THE GREAT CIRCLE OF LIFE... THAN DEATH?
YOURS OR MINE, PUPPY...! LET NATURE AND THE CLASH OF OUR LIGHTSABERS DECIDE!

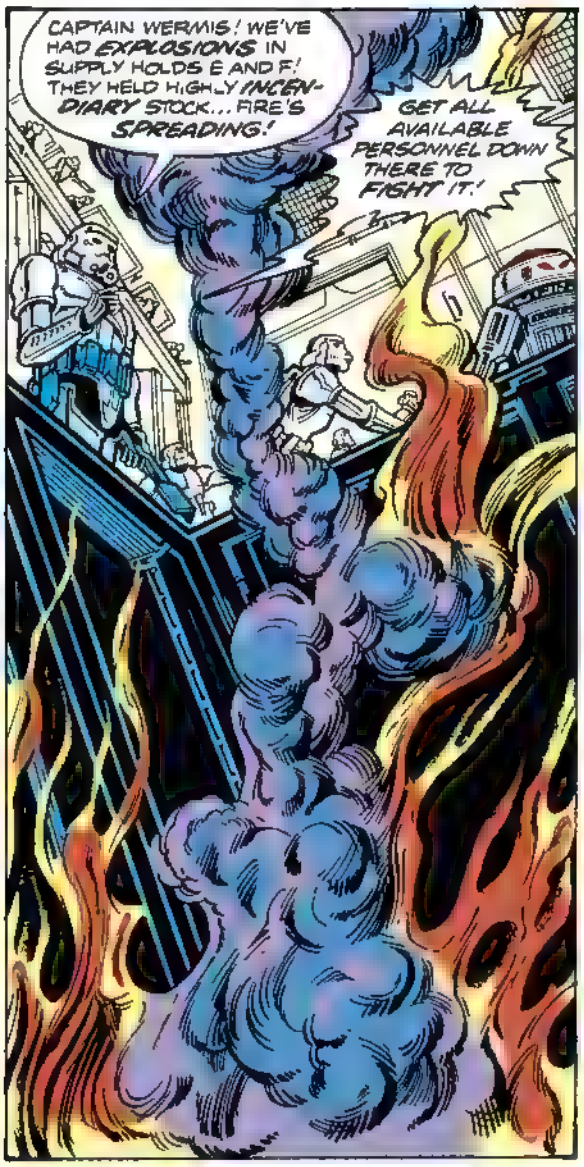


HOLD! YOU WERE ALLOWED TO KEEP THOSE SABERS BECAUSE IN AN AGE OF BLASTERS THEY SEEM MERELY CEREMONIAL WEAPONS--
--BUT THEY WILL NOT BE USED IN THIS TEMPLE OF PEACE!

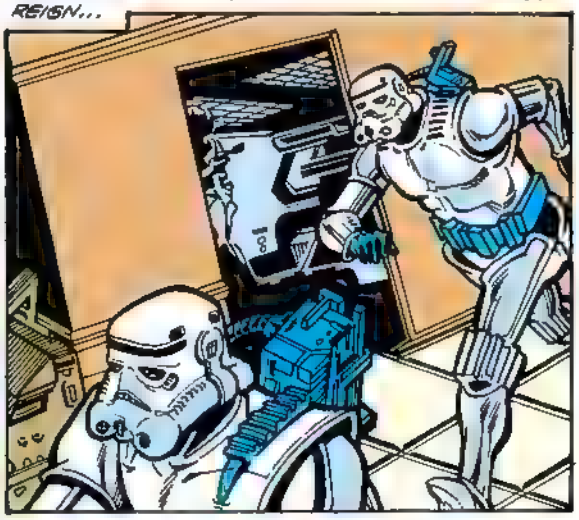

AS ALL-HIGH PRIESTESS I GIVE MY SANCTION FOR THIS DUEL TO BE FOUGHT. WHERE THE GREAT CIRCLE OF LIFE WILL NOT BE DISTURBED OR PROFANED.
THE TWO OF YOU WILL MEET IN THE CRYSTAL VALLEY... AT SUNDOWN.
THIS NOT PRECISELY AS VADER PLANNED...

...STILL, A GOOD PLAN ALLOWS FOR VARIATION. THERE IS ONLY SO MUCH HE CAN ABSOLUTELY CONTROL...

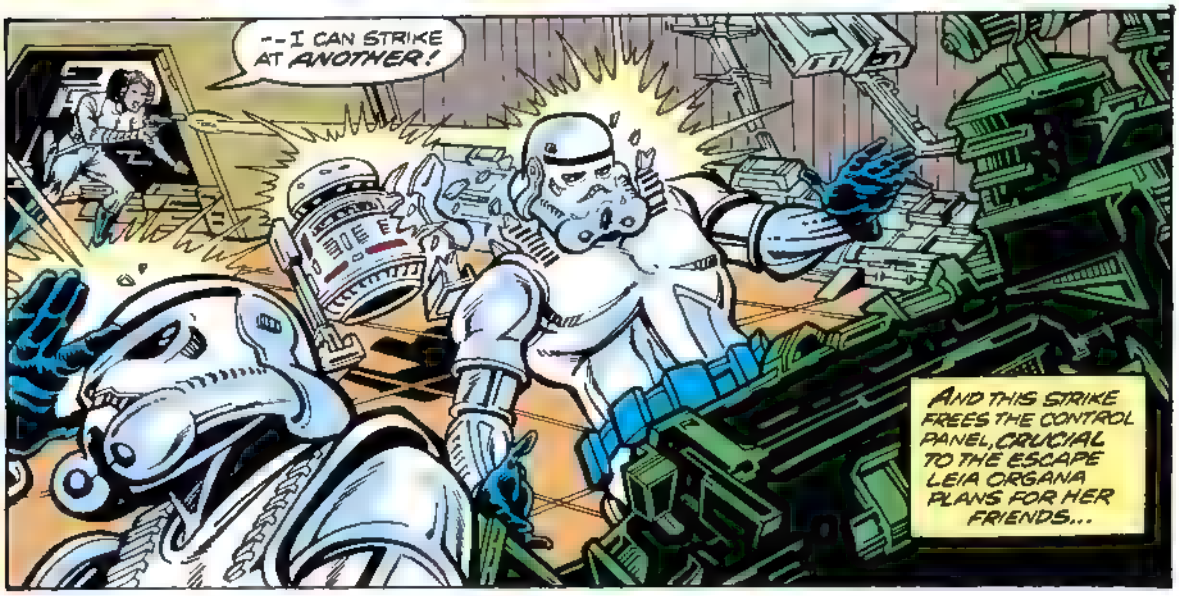

BARON TAGGE SEEMS TO HAVE COMPLETELY RECOVERED? MEDICAL SECTION, LORD VADER LEFT ME NO INSTRUCTIONS ON THE MATTER!
JUST KEEP HIM IN THE LIFE SUPPORT CAPSULE. I'M ON MY WAY THER--

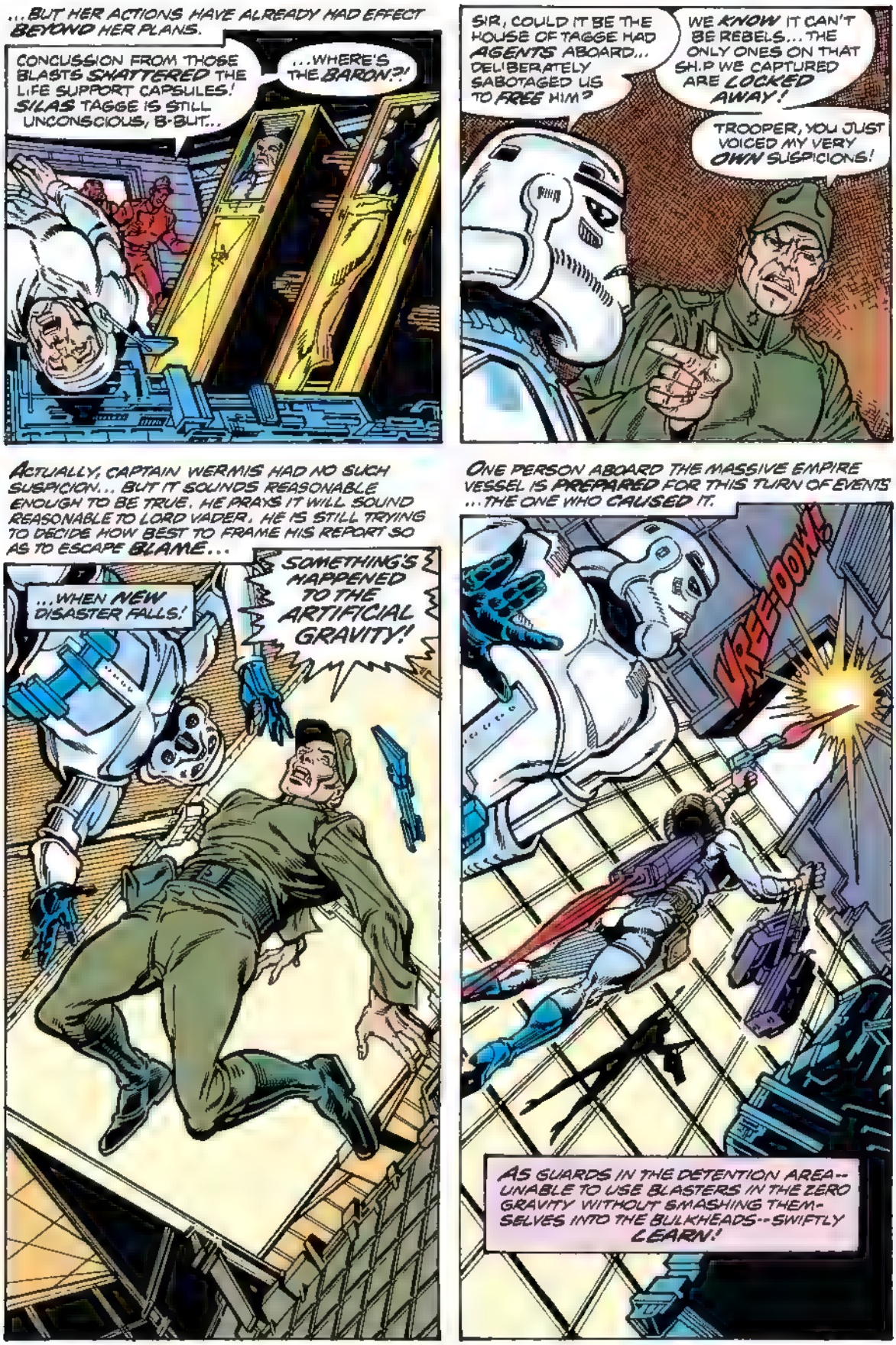

CAPTAIN WERMIS! WE'VE HAD EXPLOSIONS IN SUPPLY HOLDS E AND F! THEY HELD HIGHLY INCENDIARY STOCK... FIRE'S SPREADING!
GET ALL AVAILABLE PERSONNEL DOWN THERE TO FIGHT IT!

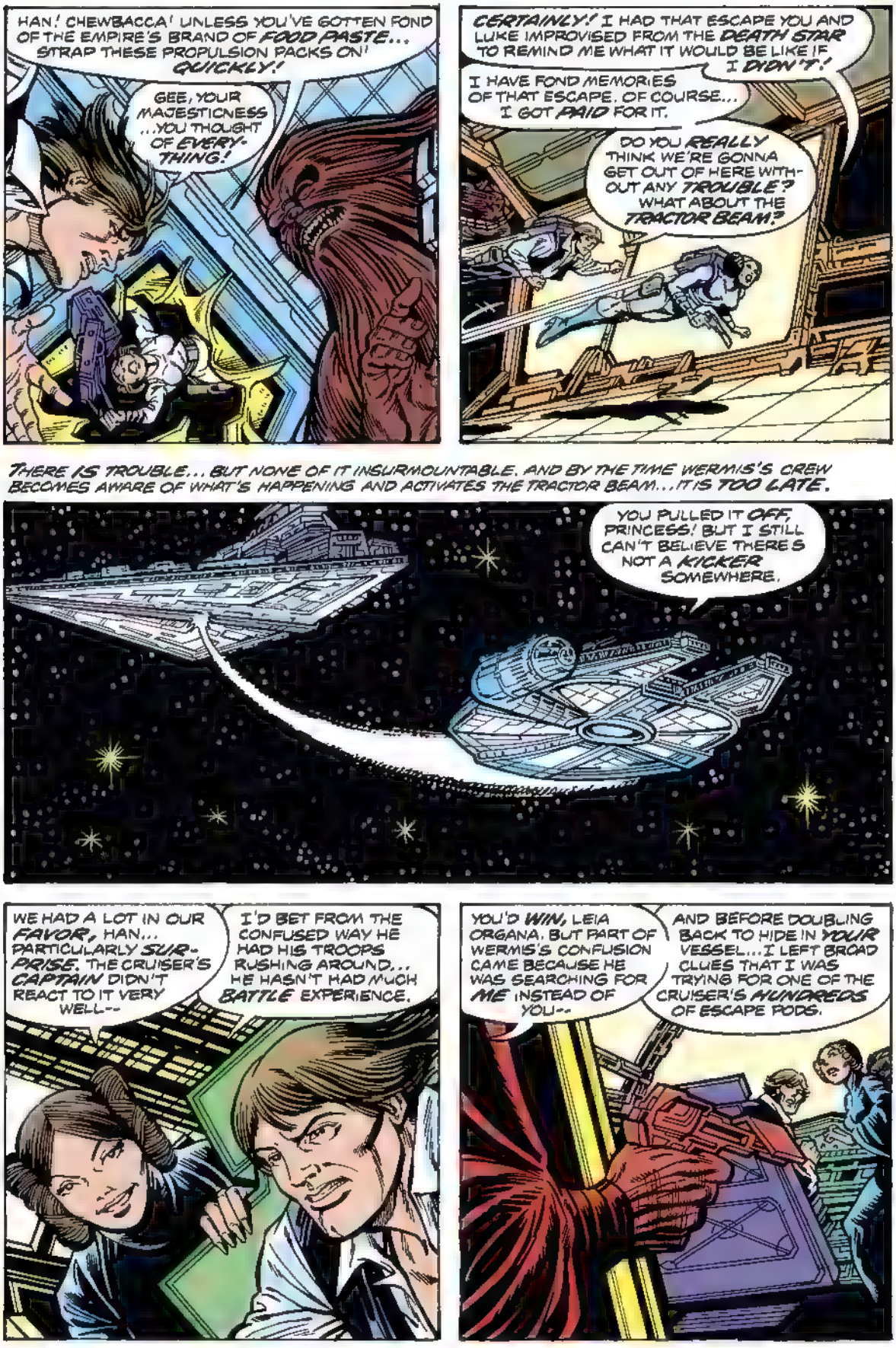
ALARMS SOUND THROUGHOUT THE GIANT STAR DESTROYER. ITS STERILE CORRIDORS ECHO WITH THE CLATTER OF MANY FEET. CONFUSION AND FRENZY REIGN...

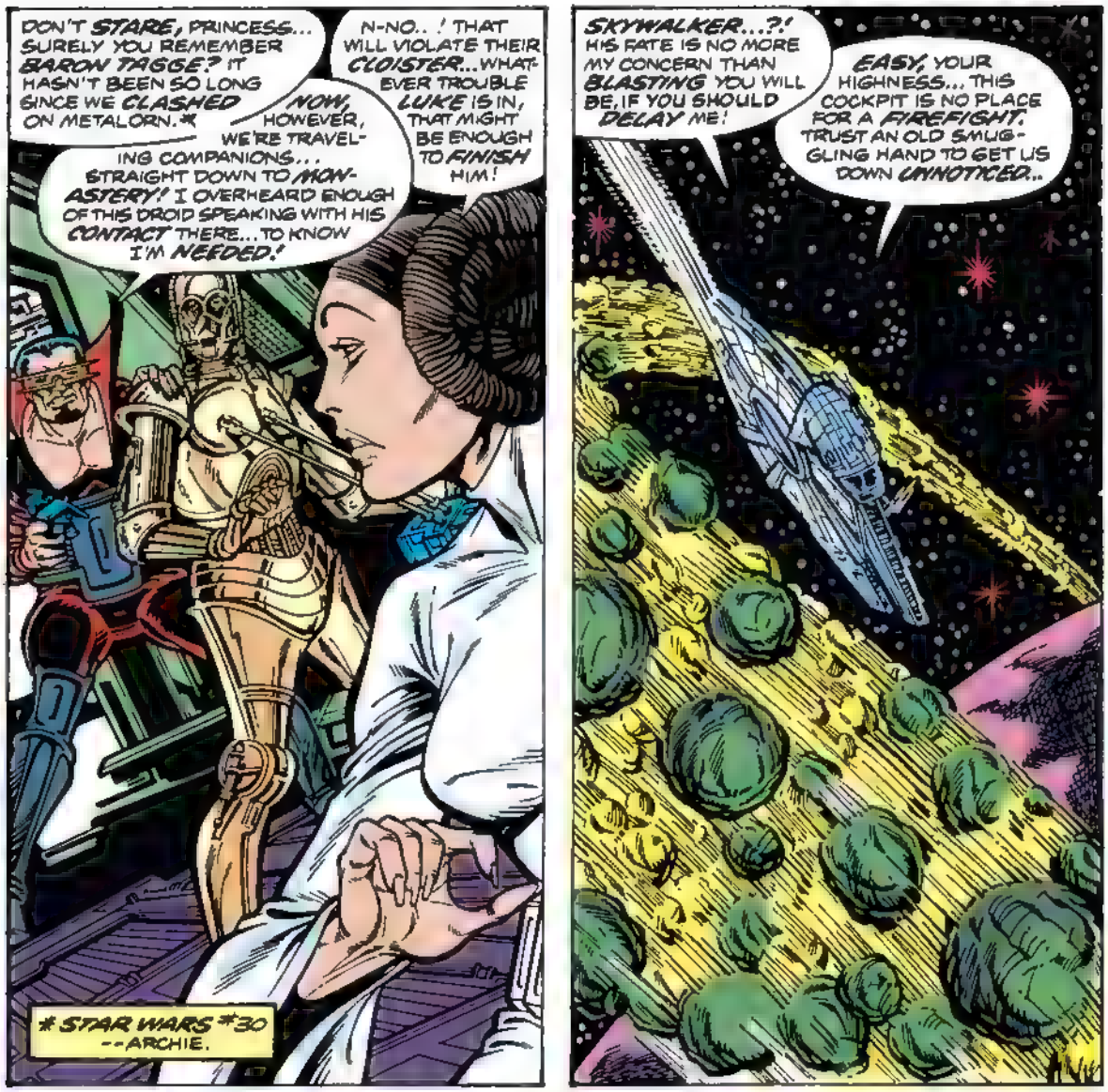


...EXCEPT IN ONE SHADOWED ALCOVE.
THOSE TIMED CHARGES ON THE PROTON GRENADES I TOOK FROM THE BAY GUARDS I SURPRISED DID THE TRICK...!
NOW, WHILE EVERYONE'S DIVERTED TO ONE PART OF THE SHIP--

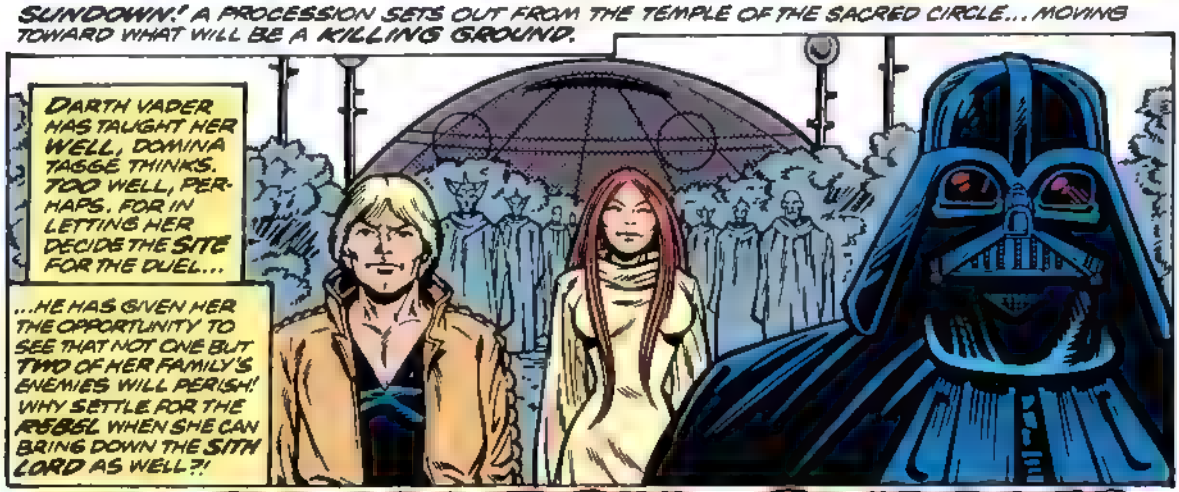



...BUT HER ACTIONS HAVE ALREADY HAD EFFECT BEYOND HER PLANS.
CONCUSSION FROM THOSE BLASTS SHATTERED THE LIFE SUPPORT CAPSULES! SILAS TAGGE IS STILL UNCONSCIOUS, B-BUT...
...WHERE'S THE BARON?!
SIR, COULD IT BE THE HOUSE OF TAGGE HAD AGENTS ABOARD... DELIBERATELY SABOTAGED US TO FREE HIM?
WE KNOW IT CAN'T BE REBELS... THE ONLY ONES ON THAT SHIP WE CAPTURED ARE LOCKED AWAY!
TROOPER, YOU JUST VOICED MY VERY OWN SUSPICIONS!
ACTUALLY, CAPTAIN WERMIS HAD NO SUCH SUSPICION... BUT IT SOUNDS REASONABLE ENOUGH TO BE TRUE. HE PRAYS IT WILL SOUND REASONABLE TO LORD VADER. HE IS STILL TRYING TO DECIDE HOW BEST TO FRAME HIS REPORT SO AS TO ESCAPE BLAME...
...WHEN NEW DISASTER FALLS!
SOMETHING'S HAPPENED TO THE ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY!
ONE PERSON ABOARD THE MASSIVE EMPIRE VESSEL IS PREPARED FOR THIS TURN OF EVENTS ...THE ONE WHO CAUSED IT.
VREE-OOM!
AS GUARDS IN THE DETENTION AREA-- UNABLE TO USE BLASTERS IN THE ZERO GRAVITY WITHOUT SMASHING THEMSELVES INTO THE BULKHEADS--SWIFTLY LEARN!

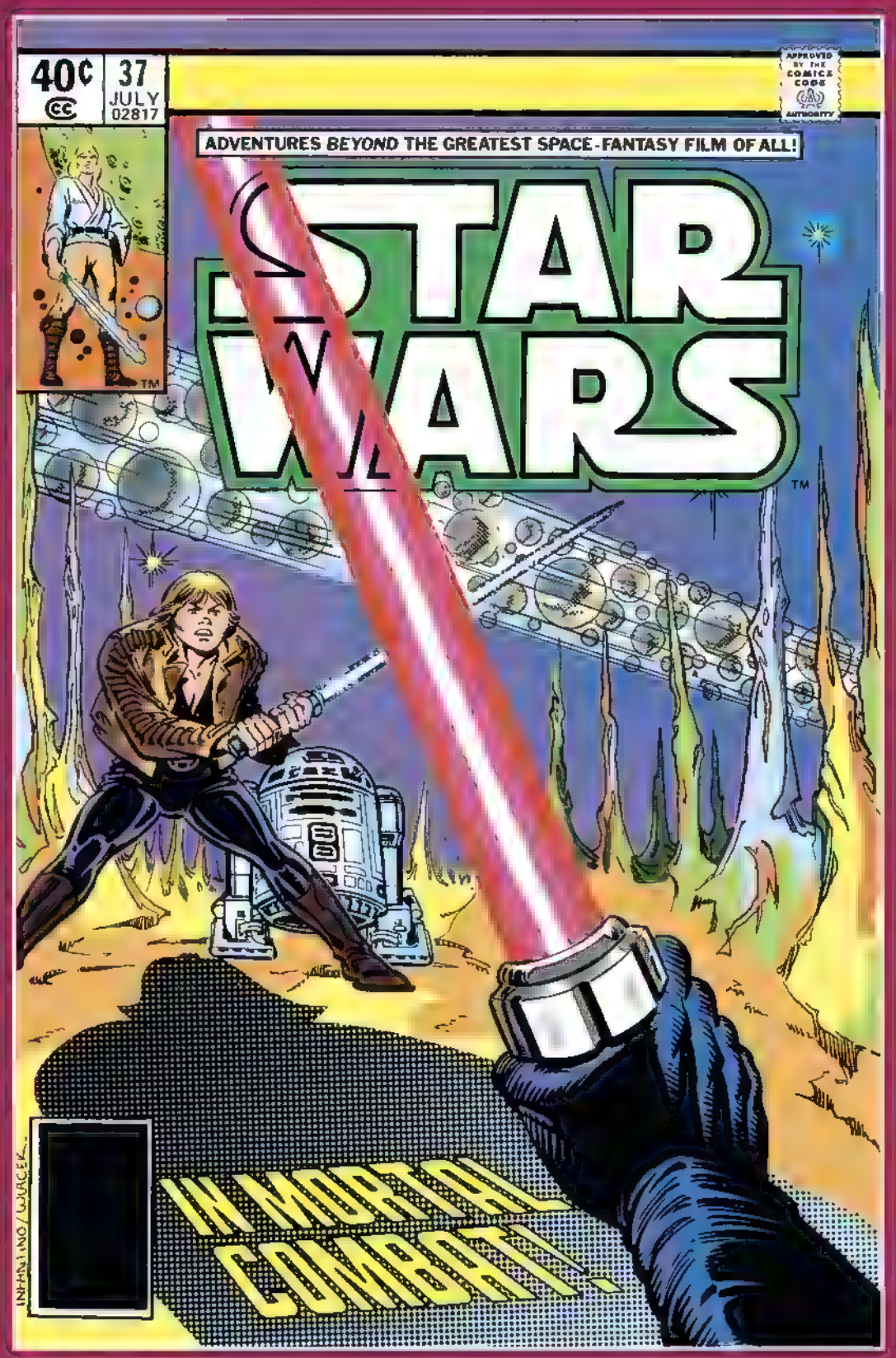

HAN! CHEWBACCA! UNLESS YOU'VE GOTTEN FOND OF THE EMPIRE'S BRAND OF FOOD PASTE... STRAP THESE PROPULSION PACKS ON! QUICKLY!
GEE, YOUR MAJESTICNESS ...YOU THOUGHT OF EVERY-THING!
CERTAINLY! I HAD THAT ESCAPE YOU AND LUKE IMPROVISED FROM THE DEATH STAR TO REMIND ME WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE IF I DIDN'T!
I HAVE FOND MEMORIES OF THAT ESCAPE. OF COURSE... I GOT PAID FOR IT.
DO YOU REALLY THINK WE'RE GONNA GET OUT OF HERE WITH-OUT ANY TROUBLE? WHAT ABOUT THE TRACTOR BEAM?
THERE IS TROUBLE... BUT NONE OF IT INSURMOUNTABLE. AND BY THE TIME WERMIS'S CREW BECOMES AWARE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING AND ACTIVATES THE TRACTOR BEAM... IT IS TOO LATE.
YOU PULLED IT OFF, PRINCESS! BUT I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THERE'S NOT A KICKER SOMEWHERE.
WE HAD A LOT IN OUR FAVOR, HAN... PARTICULARLY SUR-PRISE. THE CRUISER'S CAPTAIN DIDN'T REACT TO IT VERY WELL--
I'D BET FROM THE CONFUSED WAY HE HAD HIS TROOPS RUSHING AROUND... HE HASN'T HAD MUCH BATTLE EXPERIENCE.
YOU'D WIN, LEIA ORGANA. BUT PART OF WERMIS'S CONFUSION CAME BECAUSE HE WAS SEARCHING FOR ME INSTEAD OF YOU--
AND BEFORE DOUBLING BACK TO HIDE IN YOUR VESSEL... I LEFT BROAD CLUES THAT I WAS TRYING FOR ONE OF THE CRUISER'S HUNDREDS OF ESCAPE PODS.


DON'T STARE, PRINCESS... SURELY YOU REMEMBER BARON TAGGE? IT HASN'T BEEN SO LONG SINCE WE CLASHED ON METALORN.*
N-NO.. ! THAT WILL VIOLATE THEIR CLOISTER...WHATEVER TROUBLE LUKE IS IN, THAT MIGHT BE ENOUGH TO FINISH HIM!
NOW, HOWEVER, WE'RE TRAVELING COMPANIONS... STRAIGHT DOWN TO MONASTERY! I OVERHEARD ENOUGH OF THIS DROID SPEAKING WITH HIS CONTACT THERE...TO KNOW I'M NEEDED!
* STAR WARS #30 --ARCHIE.
SKYWALKER...?! HIS FATE IS NO MORE MY CONCERN THAN BLASTING YOU WILL BE, IF YOU SHOULD DELAY ME!
EASY, YOUR HIGHNESS... THIS COCKPIT IS NO PLACE FOR A FIREFIGHT. TRUST AN OLD SMUGGLING HAND TO GET US DOWN UNNOTICED..

SUNDOWN! A PROCESSION SETS OUT FROM THE TEMPLE OF THE SACRED CIRCLE... MOVING TOWARD WHAT WILL BE A KILLING GROUND.


DARTH VADER HAS TAUGHT HER WELL, DOMINA TAGGE THINKS. TOO WELL, PERHAPS. FOR IN LETTING HER DECIDE THE SITE FOR THE DUEL...
...HE HAS GIVEN HER THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THAT NOT ONE BUT TWO OF HER FAMILY'S ENEMIES WILL PERISH! WHY SETTLE FOR THE REBEL WHEN SHE CAN BRING DOWN THE SITH LORD AS WELL?!

NEXT ISSUE: IN MORTAL COMBAT!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STAR WARS
IN MORTAL COMBAT
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SUNSET ON THE RINGED PLANET OF MONASTERY, CLOISTERED HOMEWORLD OF THE ORDER OF THE SACRED CIRCLE. A DIPLOMATIC MISSION FOR THE REBEL ALLIANCE HAS BROUGHT LUKE SKYWALKER HERE. THE BAROQUE SCHEMING OF DARTH VADER MAY NOW SEE THAT MISSION END...

IN MORTAL COMBAT!

THERE! BELOW THE EVENING MISTS LIES THE CRYSTAL VALLEY.

TWO SEPARATE PATHS LEAD DOWN TO IT FROM THIS POINT. YOU EACH WILL TAKE ONE. WHEN YOU MEET IN THE VALLEY--

--YOUR DUEL MAY BEGIN!

ARCHIE GOODWIN writer/editor · CARMINE INFANTINO and GENE DAY artists · JOHN COSTANZA letterer · NEL YOMTOV colorist · JIM SHOOTER consulting editor

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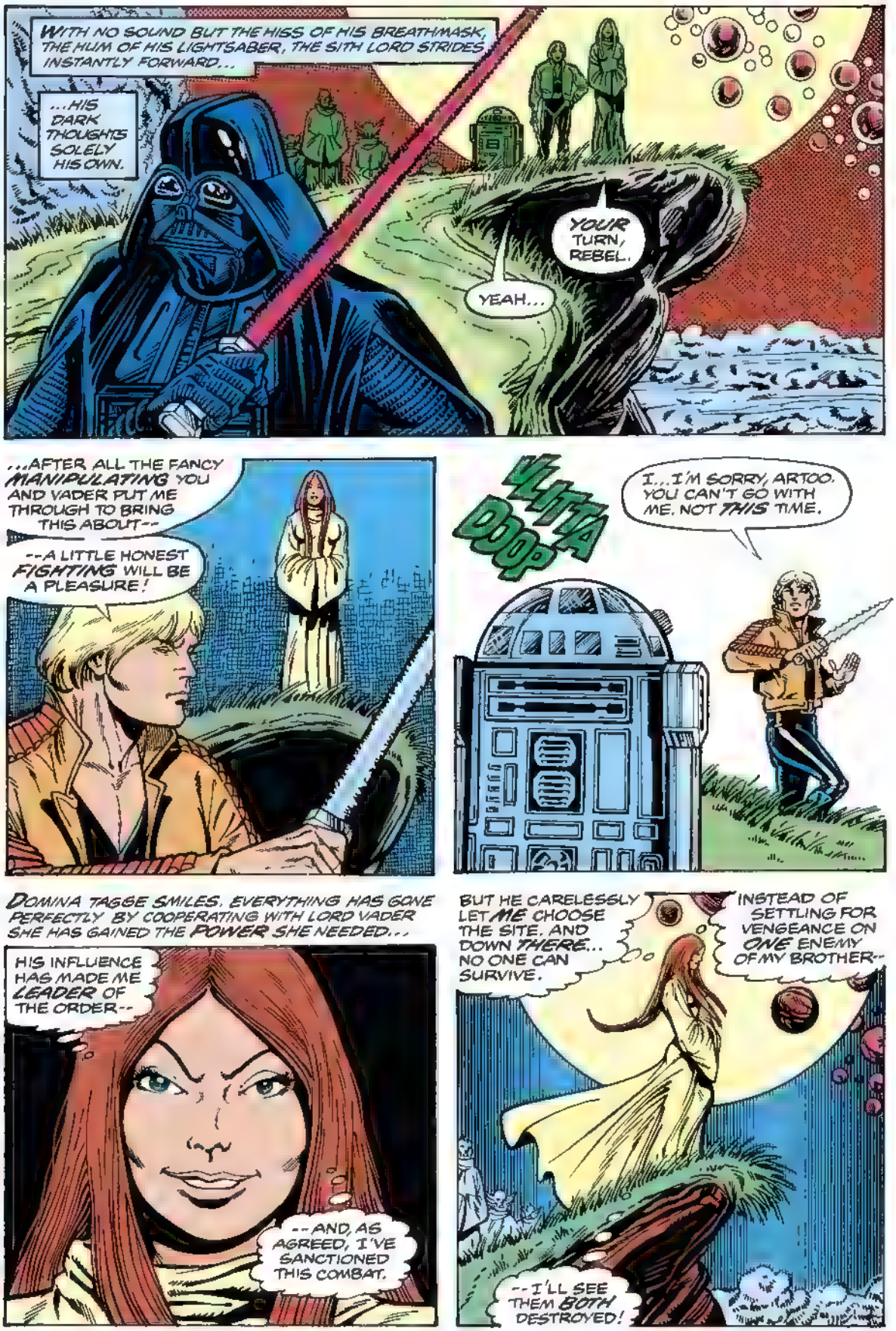
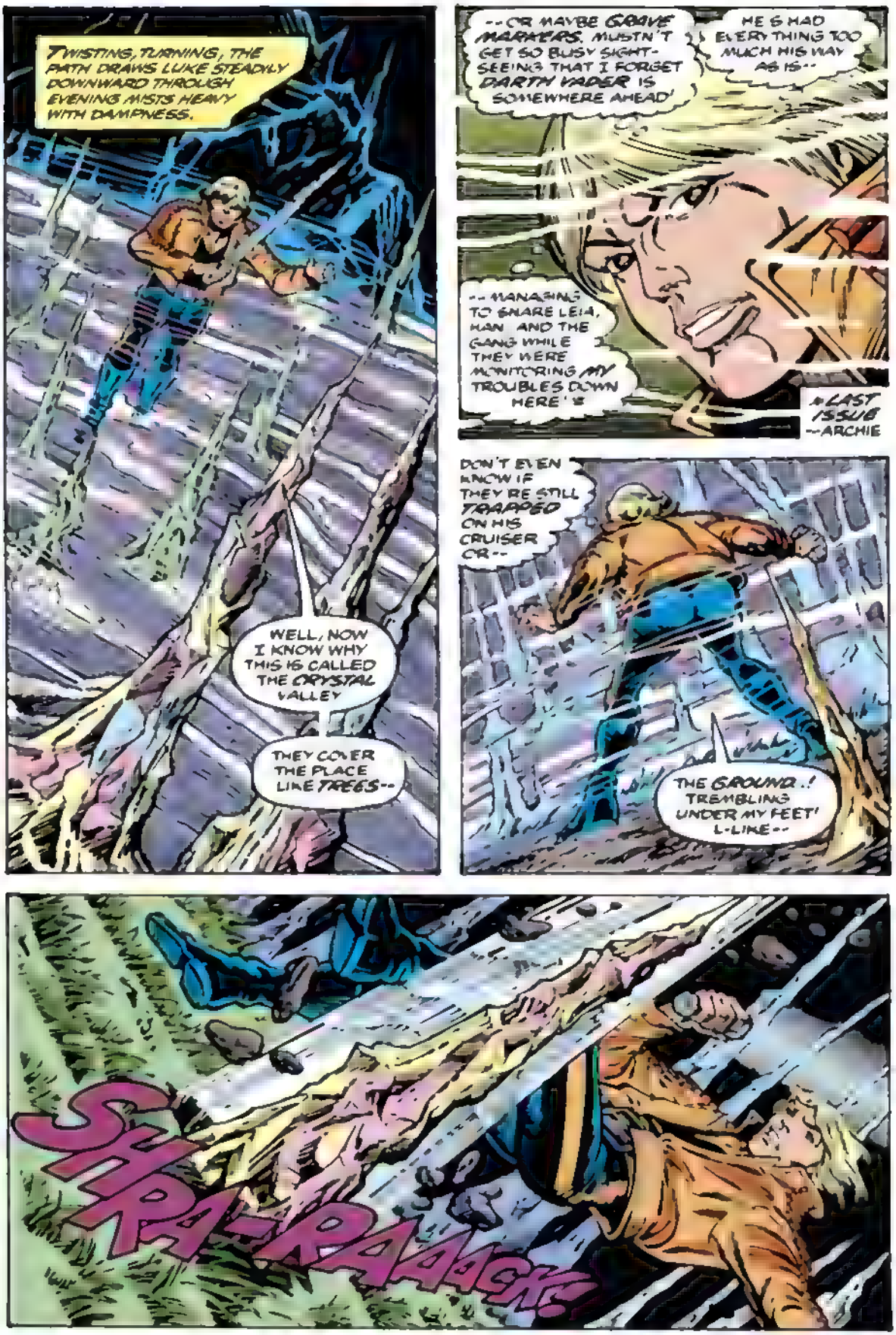
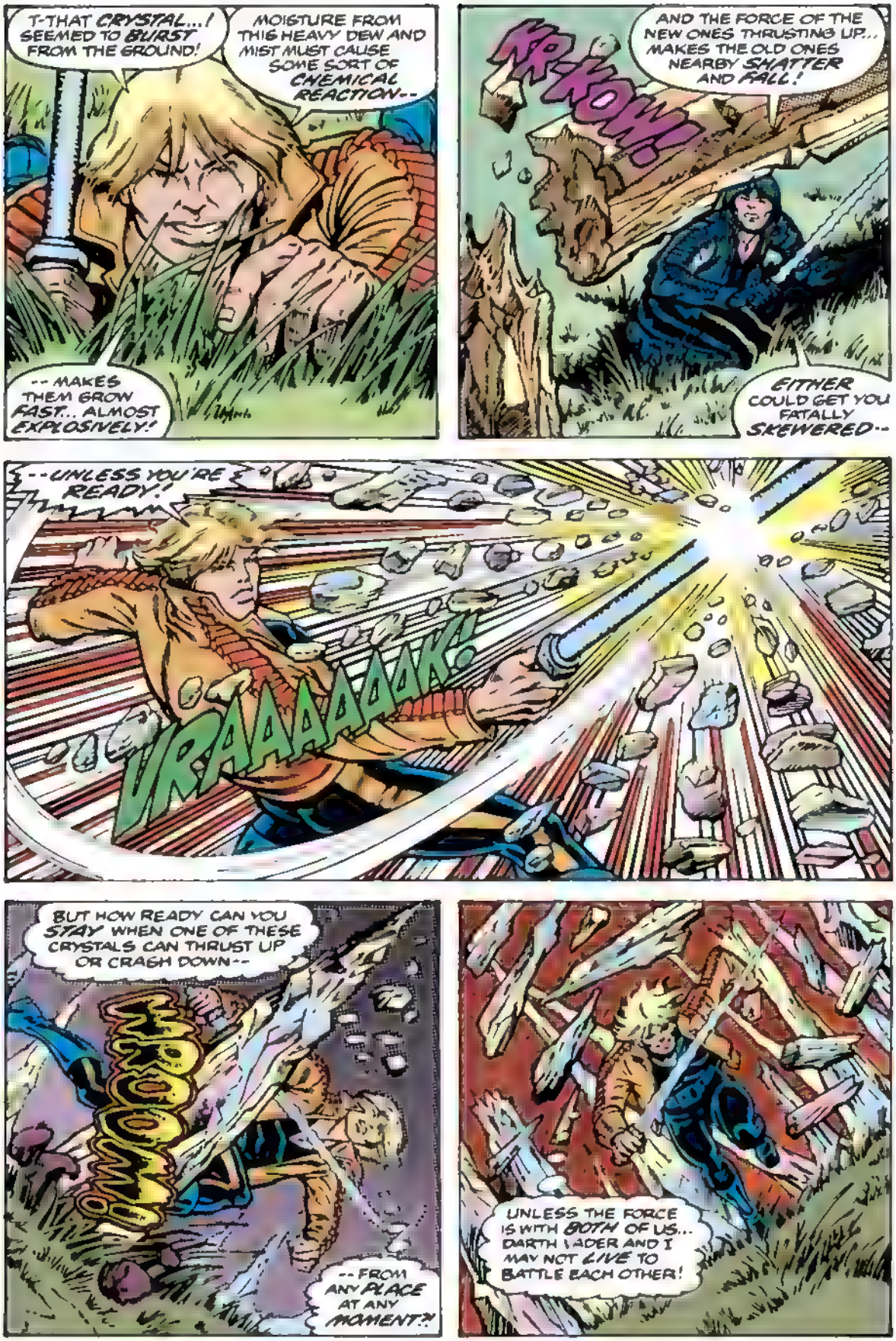
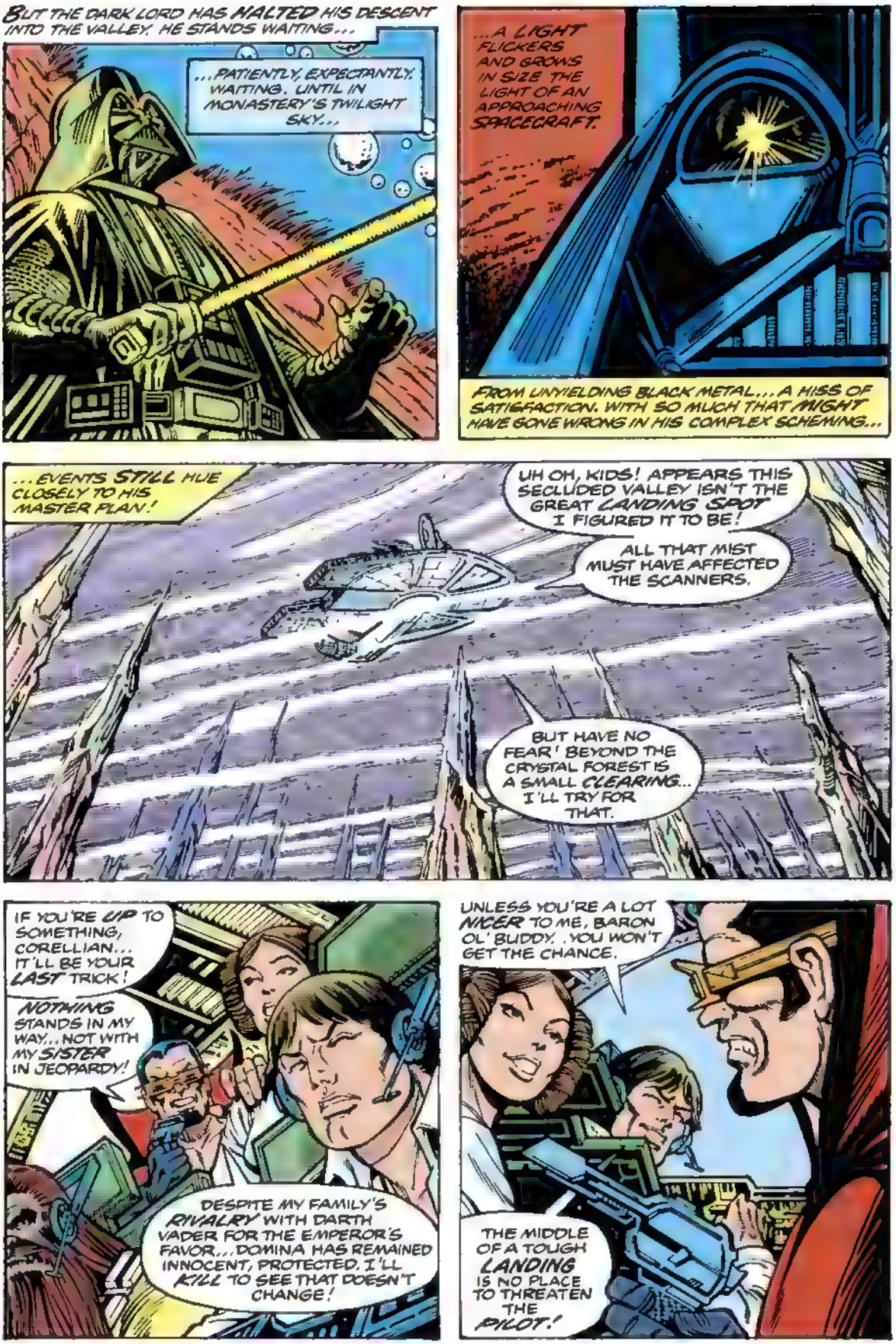
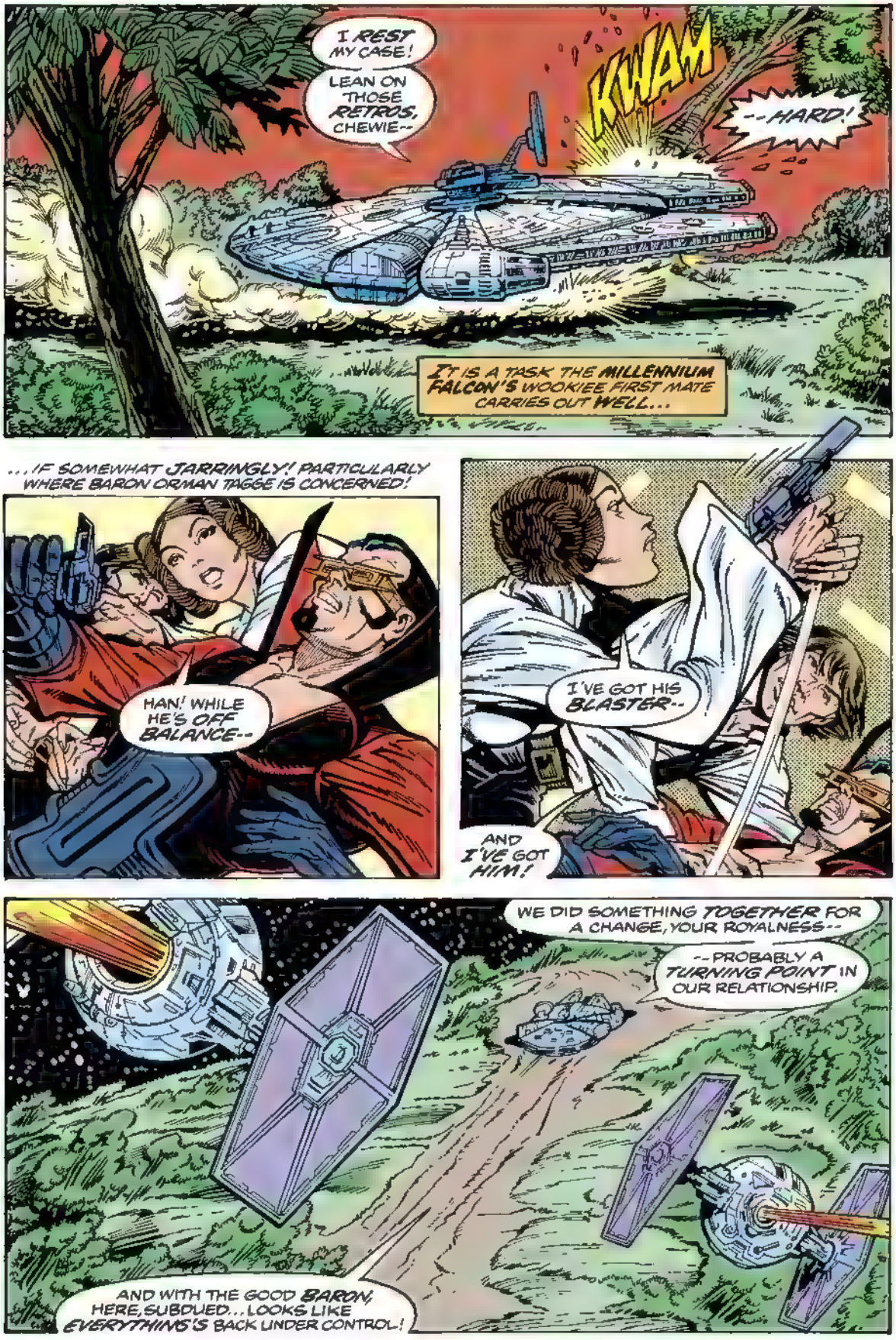
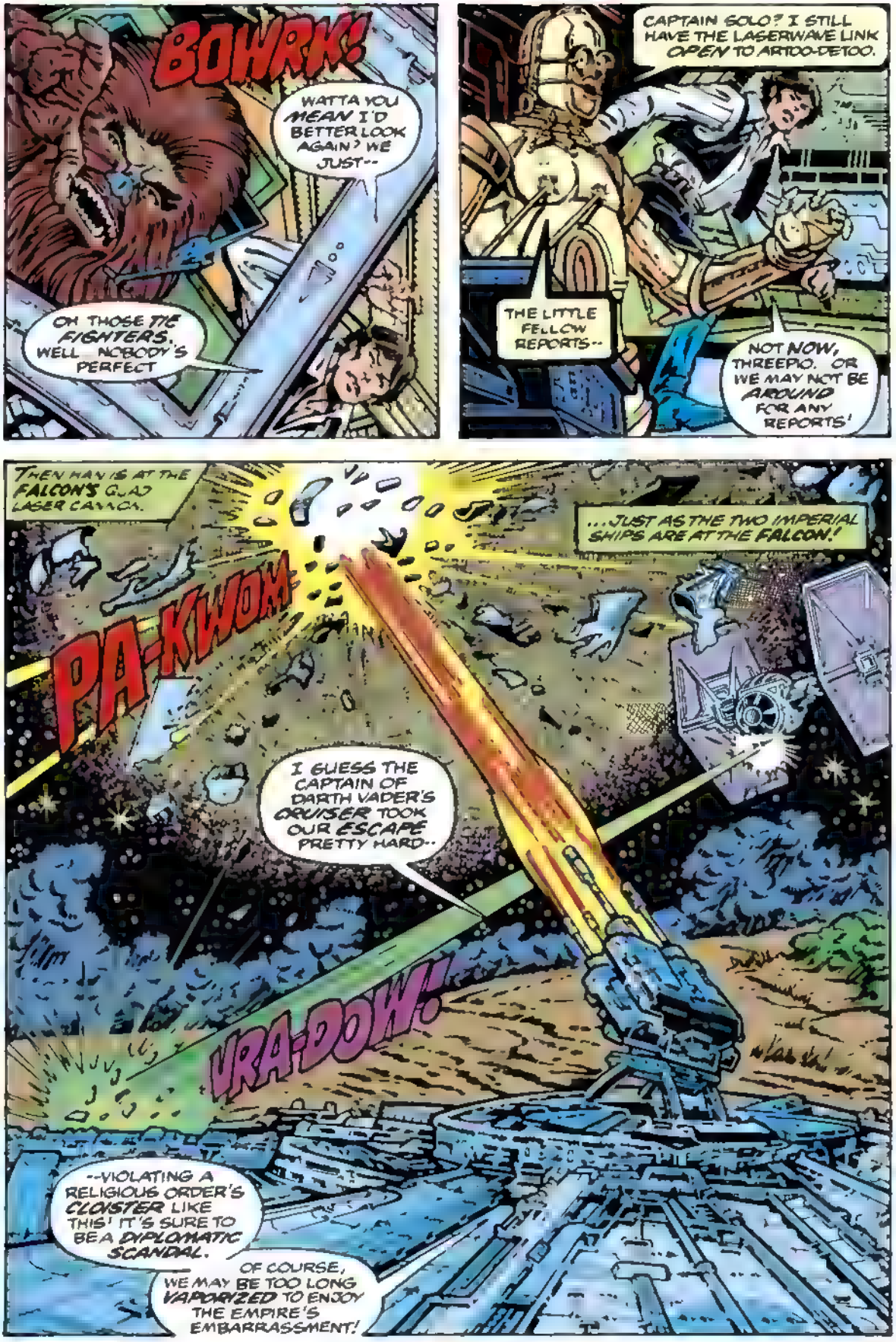

WITH NO SOUND BUT THE HISS OF HIS BREATHMASK, THE HUM OF HIS LIGHTSABER, THE SITH LORD STRIDES INSTANTLY FORWARD...
...HIS DARK THOUGHTS SOLELY HIS OWN.
YOUR TURN, REBEL.
YEAH...
...AFTER ALL THE FANCY MANIPULATING YOU AND VADER PUT ME THROUGH TO BRING THIS ABOUT--
--A LITTLE HONEST FIGHTING WILL BE A PLEASURE!
YUTTA DOOP
I...I'M SORRY, ARTOO. YOU CAN'T GO WITH ME. NOT THIS TIME.
DOMINA TAGGE SMILES. EVERYTHING HAS GONE PERFECTLY BY COOPERATING WITH LORD VADER SHE HAS GAINED THE POWER SHE NEEDED...
HIS INFLUENCE HAS MADE ME LEADER OF THE ORDER--
--AND, AS AGREED, I'VE SANCTIONED THIS COMBAT.
BUT HE CARELESSLY LET ME CHOOSE THE SITE, AND DOWN THERE... NO ONE CAN SURVIVE.
INSTEAD OF SETTLING FOR VENGEANCE ON ONE ENEMY OF MY BROTHER--
--I'LL SEE THEM BOTH DESTROYED!


TWISTING, TURNING, THE PATH DRAWS LUKE STEADILY DOWNWARD THROUGH EVENING MISTS HEAVY WITH DAMPNESS.
WELL, NOW I KNOW WHY THIS IS CALLED THE CRYSTAL VALLEY
THEY COVER THE PLACE LIKE TREES--
--OR MAYBE GRAVE MARKERS. MUSTN'T GET SO BUSY SIGHT-SEEING THAT I FORGET DARTH VADER IS SOMEWHERE AHEAD!
HE'S HAD EVERYTHING TOO MUCH HIS WAY AS IS--
-- MANAGING TO SNARE LEIA, HAN AND THE GANG WHILE THEY WERE MONITORING MY TROUBLES DOWN HERE!
*LAST ISSUE --ARCHIE
DON'T EVEN KNOW IF THEY'RE STILL TRAPPED ON HIS CRUISER OR--
THE GROUND..! TREMBLING UNDER MY FEET! L-LIKE--
SKRA-RAAACK!

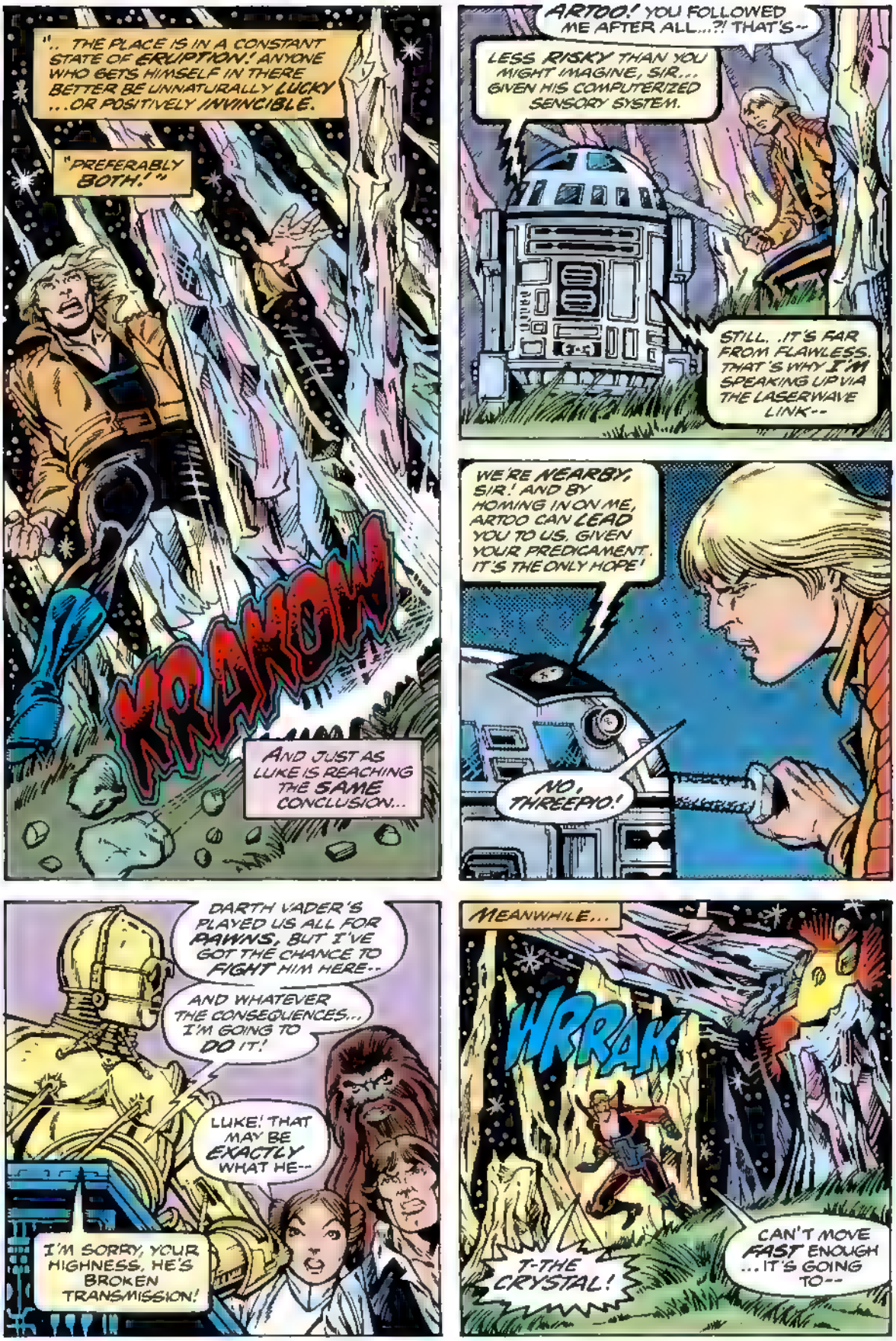

T-THAT CRYSTAL...! SEEMED TO BURST FROM THE GROUND!
MOISTURE FROM THIS HEAVY DEW AND MIST MUST CAUSE SOME SORT OF CHEMICAL REACTION--
-- MAKES THEM GROW FAST... ALMOST EXPLOSIVELY!
KR-KOW!
AND THE FORCE OF THE NEW ONES THRUSTING UP... MAKES THE OLD ONES NEARBY SHATTER AND FALL!
EITHER COULD GET YOU FATALLY SKEWERED--
--UNLESS YOU'RE READY!
URAAAAAAAK!
BUT HOW READY CAN YOU STAY WHEN ONE OF THESE CRYSTALS CAN THRUST UP OR CRASH DOWN--
WROOOM!
-- FROM ANY PLACE AT ANY MOMENT?!
UNLESS THE FORCE IS WITH BOTH OF US... DARTH VADER AND I MAY NOT LIVE TO BATTLE EACH OTHER!


BUT THE DARK LORD HAS HALTED HIS DESCENT INTO THE VALLEY. HE STANDS WAITING...
...PATIENTLY, EXPECTANTLY. WAITING. UNTIL IN MONASTERY'S TWILIGHT SKY...
...A LIGHT FLICKERS AND GROWS IN SIZE THE LIGHT OF AN APPROACHING SPACECRAFT.
FROM UNYIELDING BLACK METAL... A HISS OF SATISFACTION. WITH SO MUCH THAT MIGHT HAVE GONE WRONG IN HIS COMPLEX SCHEMING...
...EVENTS STILL HUE CLOSELY TO HIS MASTER PLAN!
UH OH, KIDS! APPEARS THIS SECLUDED VALLEY ISN'T THE GREAT LANDING SPOT I FIGURED IT TO BE!
ALL THAT MIST MUST HAVE AFFECTED THE SCANNERS.
BUT HAVE NO FEAR! BEYOND THE CRYSTAL FOREST IS A SMALL CLEARING... I'LL TRY FOR THAT.
IF YOU'RE UP TO SOMETHING, CORELLIAN... IT'LL BE YOUR LAST TRICK!
NOTHING STANDS IN MY WAY... NOT WITH MY SISTER IN JEOPARDY!
DESPITE MY FAMILY'S RIVALRY WITH DARTH VADER FOR THE EMPEROR'S FAVOR... DOMINA HAS REMAINED INNOCENT, PROTECTED. I'LL KILL TO SEE THAT DOESN'T CHANGE!
UNLESS YOU'RE A LOT NICER TO ME, BARON OL' BUDDY, YOU WON'T GET THE CHANCE.
THE MIDDLE OF A TOUGH LANDING IS NO PLACE TO THREATEN THE PILOT!

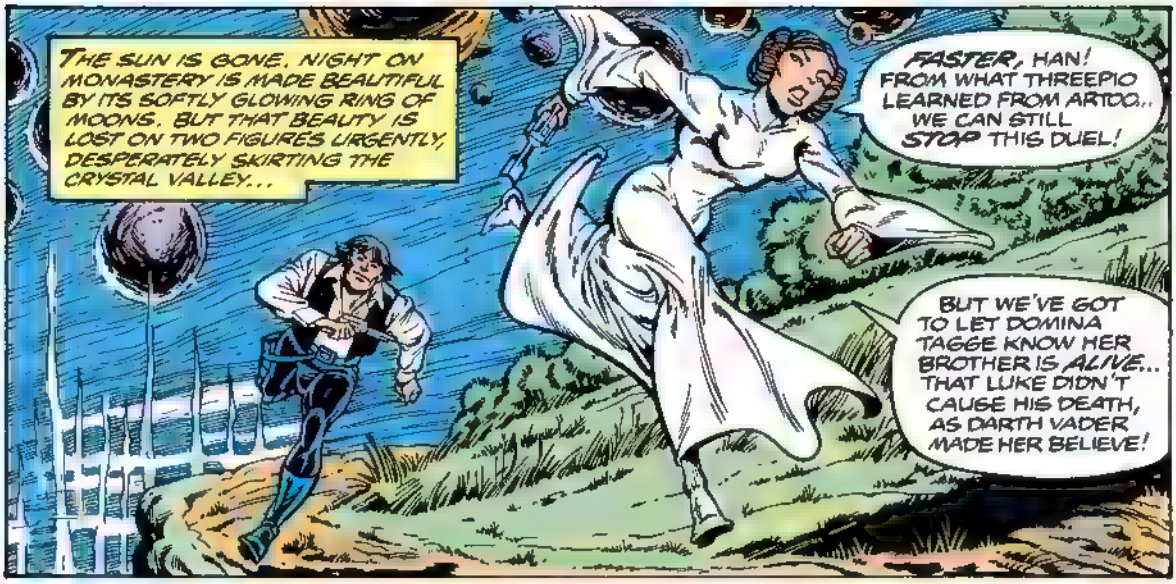

I REST MY CASE!
LEAN ON THOSE RETROS, CHEWIE--
KWAM
--HARD!
IT IS A TASK THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S WOOKIEE FIRST MATE CARRIES OUT WELL...
...IF SOMEWHAT JARRINGLY! PARTICULARLY WHERE BARON ORMAN TAGGE IS CONCERNED!
HAN! WHILE HE'S OFF BALANCE--
I'VE GOT HIS BLASTER--
AND I'VE GOT HIM!
WE DID SOMETHING TOGETHER FOR A CHANGE, YOUR ROYALNESS--
--PROBABLY A TURNING POINT IN OUR RELATIONSHIP.
AND WITH THE GOOD BARON HERE, SUBDUED... LOOKS LIKE EVERYTHING'S BACK UNDER CONTROL!


BOWRK!
WATTA YOU MEAN I'D BETTER LOOK AGAIN? WE JUST--
OH THOSE TIE FIGHTERS.. WELL NOBODY'S PERFECT
CAPTAIN SOLO? I STILL HAVE THE LASERWAVE LINK OPEN TO ARTOO-DETOO.
THE LITTLE FELLOW REPORTS--
NOT NOW, THREEPIO. OR WE MAY NOT BE AROUND FOR ANY REPORTS!
THEN HAN IS AT THE FALCON'S GLAD LASER CANNON.
...JUST AS THE TWO IMPERIAL SHIPS ARE AT THE FALCON!
PA-KWOW
I GUESS THE CAPTAIN OF DARTH VADER'S CRUISER TOOK OUR ESCAPE PRETTY HARD--
VRA-DOW!
--VIOLATING A RELIGIOUS ORDER'S CLOISTER LIKE THIS! IT'S SURE TO BE A DIPLOMATIC SCANDAL.
OF COURSE, WE MAY BE TOO LONG VAPORIZED TO ENJOY THE EMPIRE'S EMBARRASSMENT!

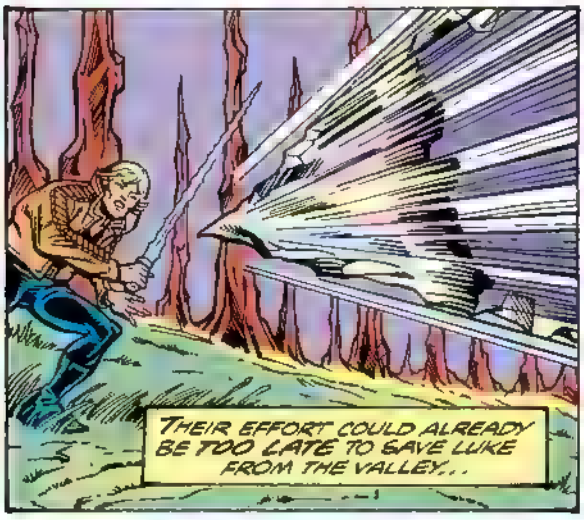
I DON'T SUPPOSE THIS IS THE TIME TO POINT OUT TO THE CAPTAIN THAT WE, TOO, ARE IN VIOLATION.
THE IRONY MIGHT ELUDE HIM--
HIGH
"--JUST AS THAT REMAINING TIE FIGHTER SEEMS TO BE DOING!"
I HEARD THAT, YOUR WORSHIP--
VRADOOM VRDOOM
AND IF I DIDN'T KNOW THESE LITTLE DIGS WERE JUST YOUR WAY OF DISGUISING YOUR TRUE FEELINGS--
--I MIGHT BE INSULTED!
KA-WOOM
I KNOW THAT KIND OF SHARPSHOOTING LEAVES YOU STUNNED, KIDS, BUT RELAX--
--IT'S OKAY TO CHEER.
EXCEPT THAT WHILE EVERYTHING ELSE WAS BREAKING LOOSE--
"...SO WAS BARON TAGGE! HE'S RACING TOWARD THAT FOREST OF CRYSTAL RIGHT NOW!
"THEN MAYBE THE JOKE'S ON HIM, PRINCESS. 'CAUSE ACCORDING TO THE SCOPES...

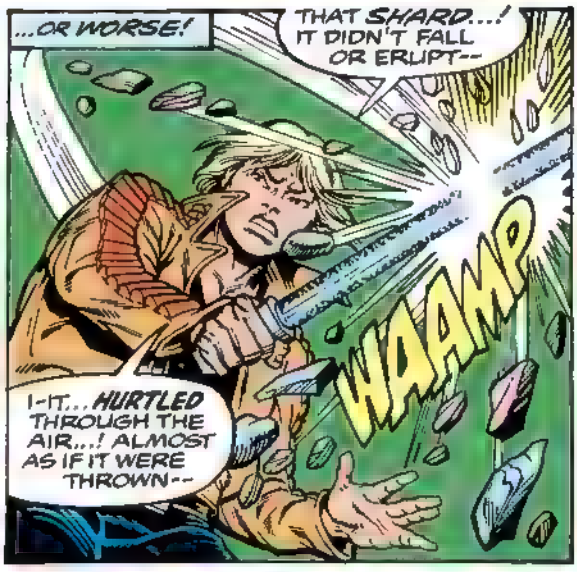

"... THE PLACE IS IN A CONSTANT STATE OF ERUPTION! ANYONE WHO GETS HIMSELF IN THERE BETTER BE UNNATURALLY LUCKY ...OR POSITIVELY INVINCIBLE.
"PREFERABLY BOTH!"
KRAKOW
AND JUST AS LUKE IS REACHING THE SAME CONCLUSION...
ARTOO! YOU FOLLOWED ME AFTER ALL...?! THAT'S--
LESS RISKY THAN YOU MIGHT IMAGINE, SIR... GIVEN HIS COMPUTERIZED SENSORY SYSTEM.
STILL, IT'S FAR FROM FLAWLESS. THAT'S WHY I'M SPEAKING UP VIA THE LASERWAVE LINK--
WE'RE NEARBY, SIR! AND BY HOMING IN ON ME, ARTOO CAN LEAD YOU TO US, GIVEN YOUR PREDICAMENT, IT'S THE ONLY HOPE!
NO, THREEPIO!
DARTH VADER'S PLAYED US ALL FOR PAWNS, BUT I'VE GOT THE CHANCE TO FIGHT HIM HERE--
AND WHATEVER THE CONSEQUENCES... I'M GOING TO DO IT!
LUKE! THAT MAY BE EXACTLY WHAT HE--
I'M SORRY, YOUR HIGHNESS, HE'S BROKEN TRANSMISSION!
MEANWHILE...
WRRAK
T-THE CRYSTAL!
CAN'T MOVE FAST ENOUGH ...IT'S GOING TO--

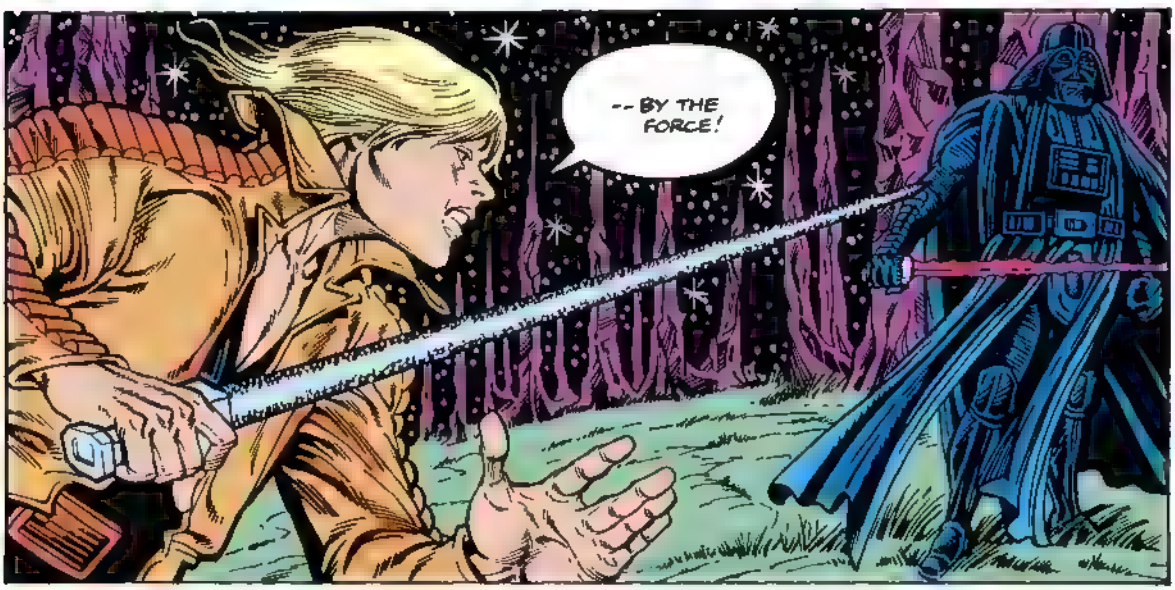
CRUSH YOU, ORMAN TAGGE...? NO, ITS GREAT BULK IS GOING TO STOP INCHES SHORT OF THAT--
IT WILL PRESS YOU DOWN... DRIVING YOU FINALLY ONTO YOUR BACK!
IT'S NOT P-POSSIBLE...!
TO A MASTER OF THE FORCE... ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.
INCLUDING LURING YOU HERE... TO THIS SPOT, AT THIS TIME.
IN THE EMPEROR'S NAME... WHY? YOU COULD HAVE SLAIN ME LONG AGO!
AN UNIMAGINATIVE VENGEANCE, BARON... YOU'VE TROUBLED ME ENOUGH TO DESERVE BETTER.
FOR INSTANCE: THIS FATE THAT'S BEFALLEN YOU--
--IS ACTUALLY WHAT YOUR DEAR LITTLE SISTER PLANNED TO HAVE HAPPEN TO ME.
DOMINA...? B-BUT... SHE'S NOT LIKE THAT! SHE'S INNOCENT ... BEYOND SUCH SCHEMING!
NO MORE, TAGGE.
WITH A BIT OF -GUIDANCE FROM ME, ANXIOUS TO AVENGE WHAT SHE THINKS IS YOUR DEATH... SHE'S CHANGED! AS THIS VISI-CUBE SHOWS--
N-NO...! THE ONE UNSULLIED, UNCORRUPTED THING IN OUR ENTIRE LINE...!
FINISH ME, VADER! YOU'VE RUINED THE ONLY PERSON IN THIS GALAXY I LOVED! FINISH ME NOW!
SOON. BUT FIRST... YOU'LL FULFILL A FINAL TASK.

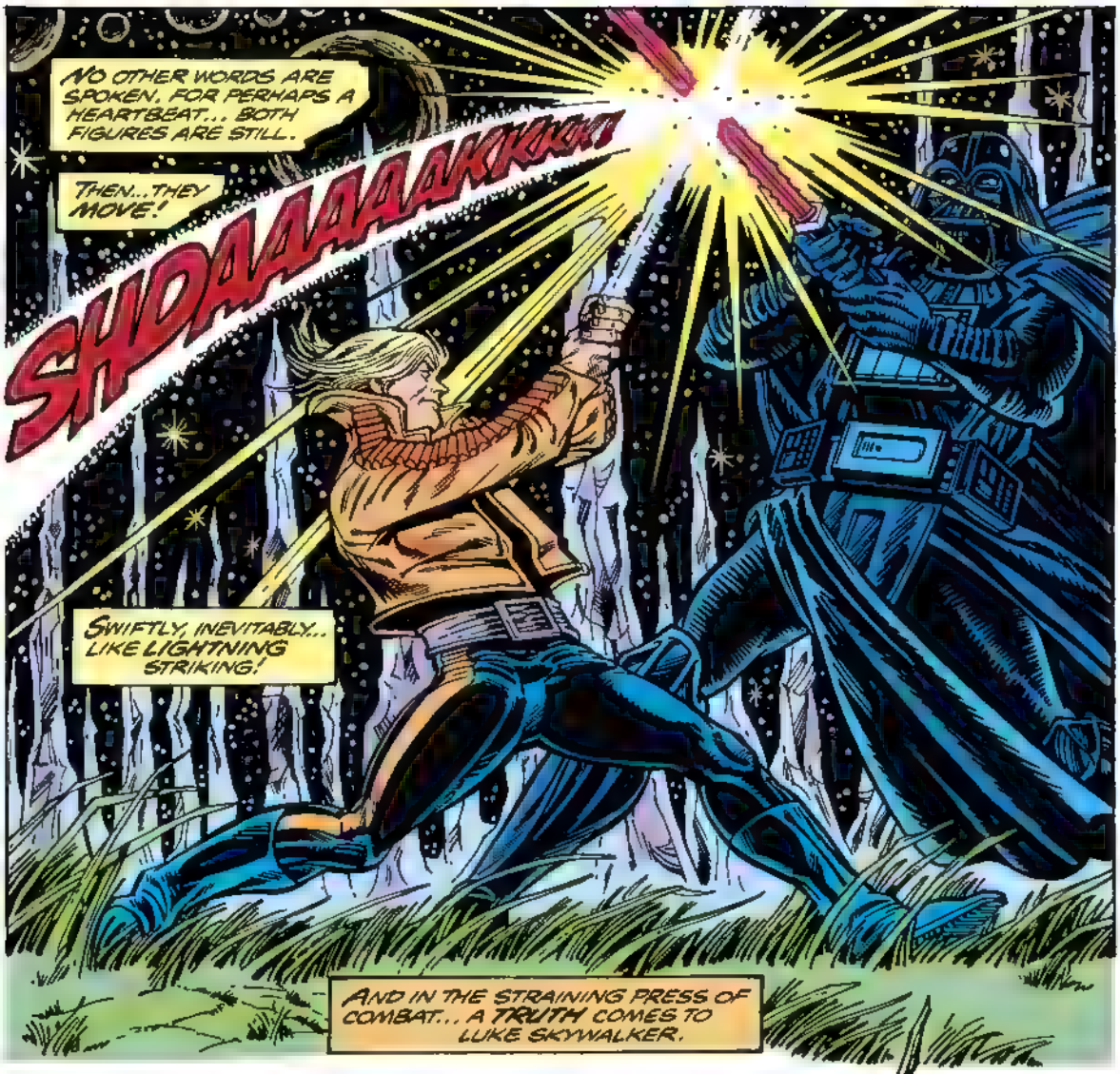

THE SUN IS GONE. NIGHT ON MONASTERY IS MADE BEAUTIFUL BY ITS SOFTLY GLOWING RING OF MOONS. BUT THAT BEAUTY IS LOST ON TWO FIGURES URGENTLY, DESPERATELY SKIRTING THE CRYSTAL VALLEY...
FASTER, HAN! FROM WHAT THREEPIO LEARNED FROM ARTOO... WE CAN STILL STOP THIS DUEL!
BUT WE'VE GOT TO LET DOMINA TAGGE KNOW HER BROTHER IS ALIVE... THAT LUKE DIDN'T CAUSE HIS DEATH, AS DARTH VADER MADE HER BELIEVE!

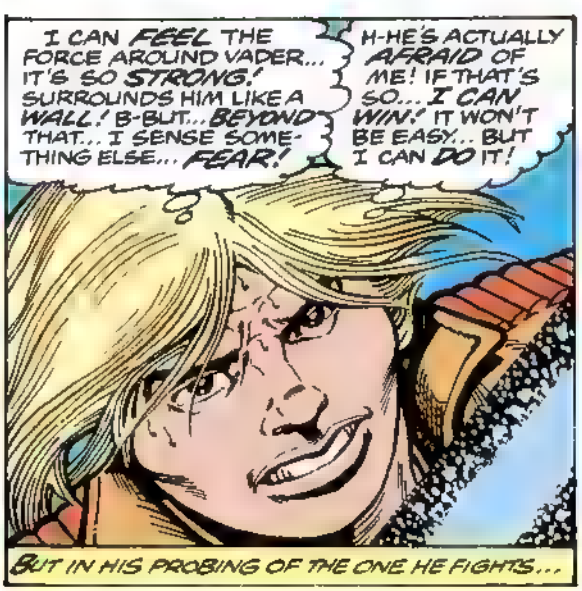
HAN DOESN'T VOICE A RESPONSE THAT OCCURS TO HIM. IT'S NO DOUBT IN LEIA'S MIND AS WELL...

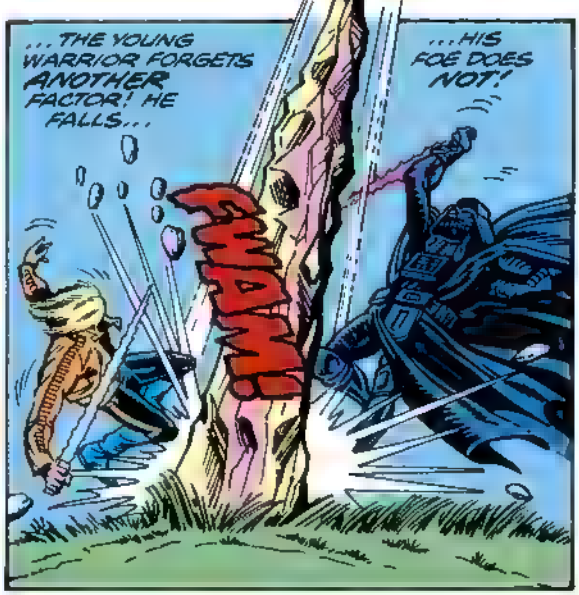


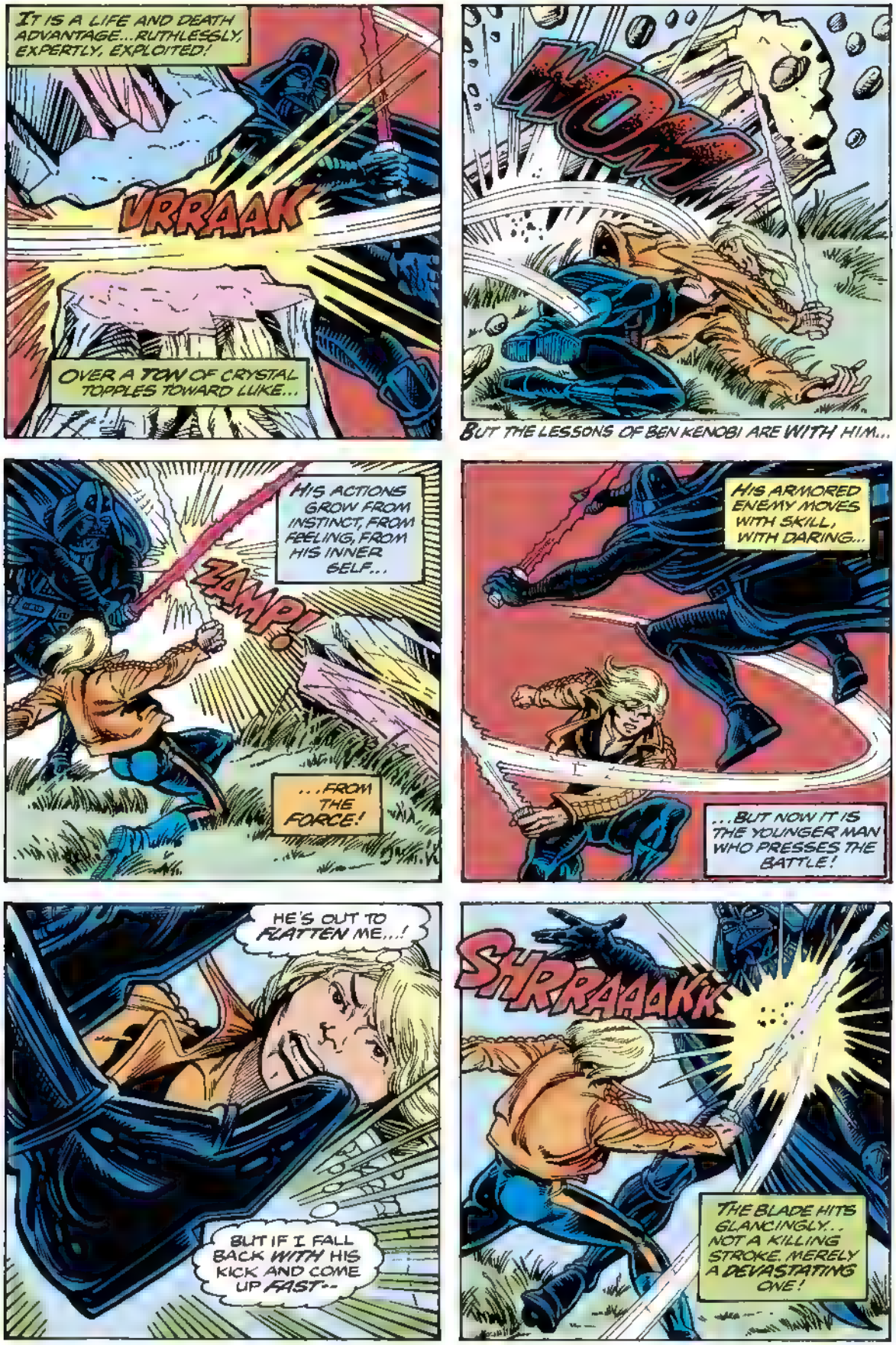


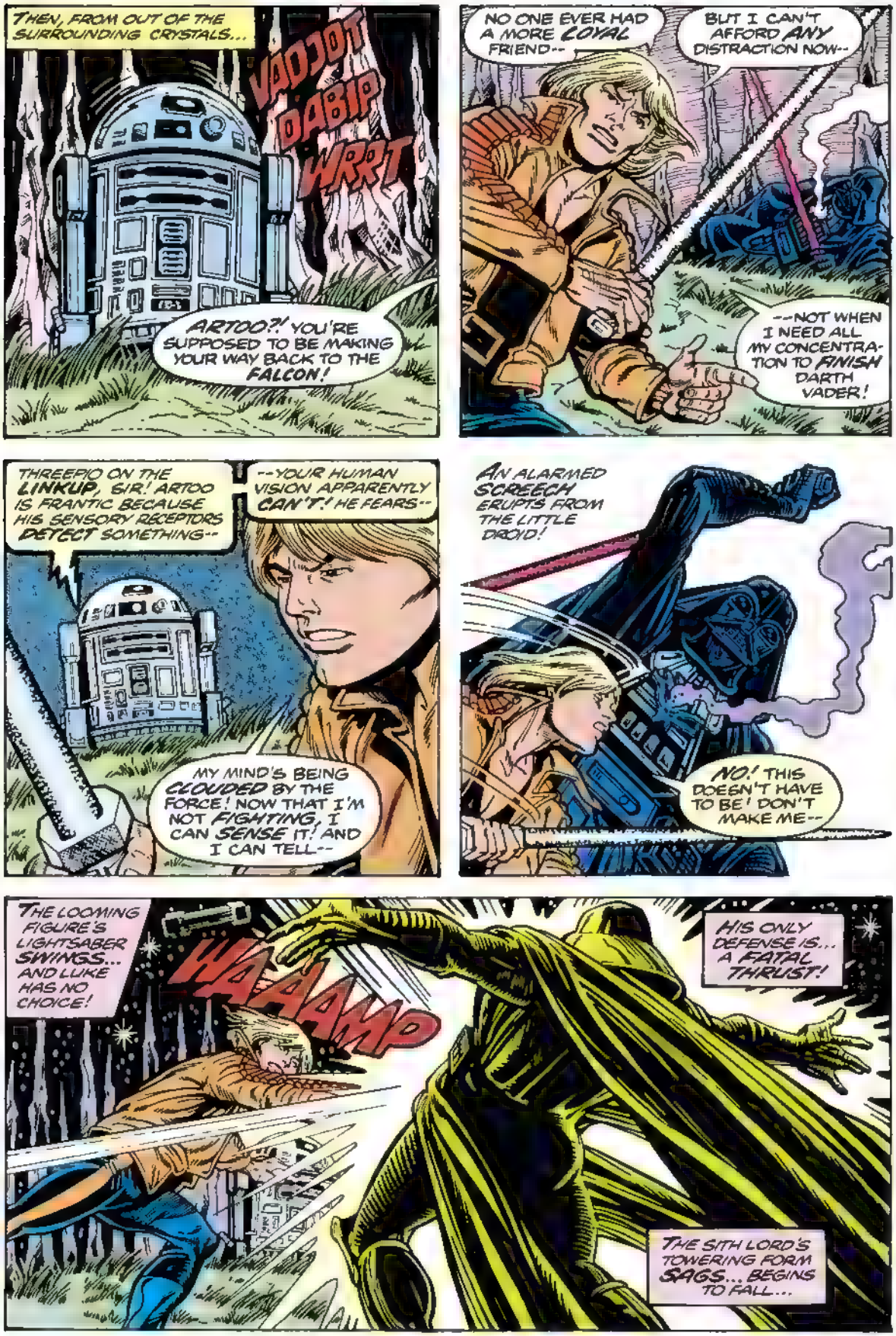


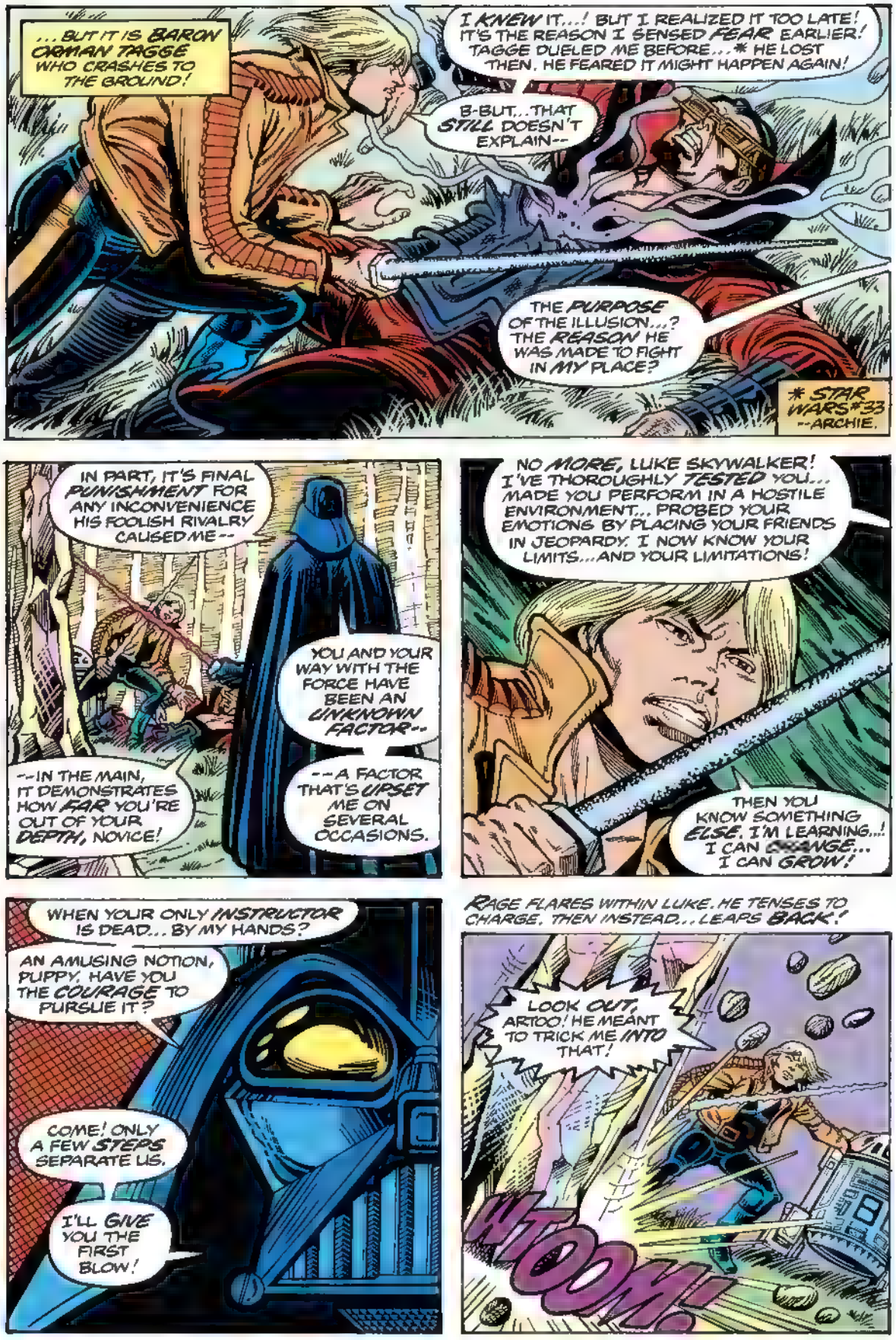

NO OTHER WORDS ARE SPOKEN. FOR PERHAPS A HEARTBEAT... BOTH FIGURES ARE STILL.
THEN...THEY MOVE!
SHOAAAAAKKKK!
SWIFTLY, INEVITABLY... LIKE LIGHTNING STRIKING!
AND IN THE STRAINING PRESS OF COMBAT... A TRUTH COMES TO LUKE SKYWALKER.


I CAN FEEL THE FORCE AROUND VADER... IT'S SO STRONG! SURROUNDS HIM LIKE A WALL! B-BUT... BEYOND THAT... I SENSE SOMETHING ELSE... FEAR!
H-HE'S ACTUALLY AFRAID OF ME! IF THAT'S SO... I CAN WIN! IT WON'T BE EASY... BUT I CAN DO IT!
BUT IN HIS PROBING OF THE ONE HE FIGHTS...

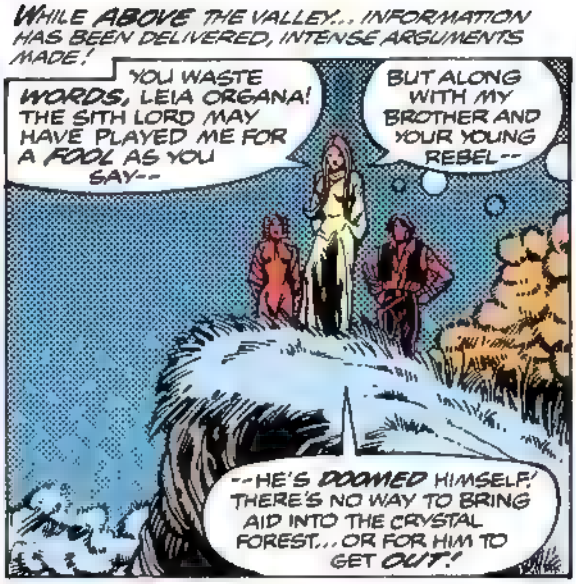

...THE YOUNG WARRIOR FORGETS ANOTHER FACTOR! HE FALLS...
...HIS FOE DOES NOT!
SWAM!

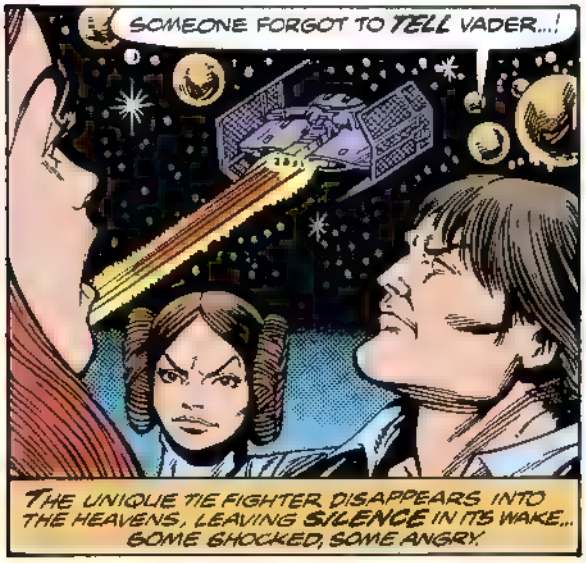

IT IS A LIFE AND DEATH ADVANTAGE...RUTHLESSLY, EXPERTLY, EXPLOITED!
VRRAAK
OVER A TON OF CRYSTAL TOPPLES TOWARD LUKE...
WOW
BUT THE LESSONS OF BEN KENOBI ARE WITH HIM...
HIS ACTIONS GROW FROM INSTINCT, FROM FEELING, FROM HIS INNER SELF...
ZAMP!
...FROM THE FORCE!
HIS ARMORED ENEMY MOVES WITH SKILL, WITH DARING...
...BUT NOW IT IS THE YOUNGER MAN WHO PRESSES THE BATTLE!
HE'S OUT TO FLATTEN ME...!
BUT IF I FALL BACK WITH HIS KICK AND COME UP FAST--
SHRRAAAKK
THE BLADE HITS GLANCINGLY... NOT A KILLING STROKE, MERELY A DEVASTATING ONE!

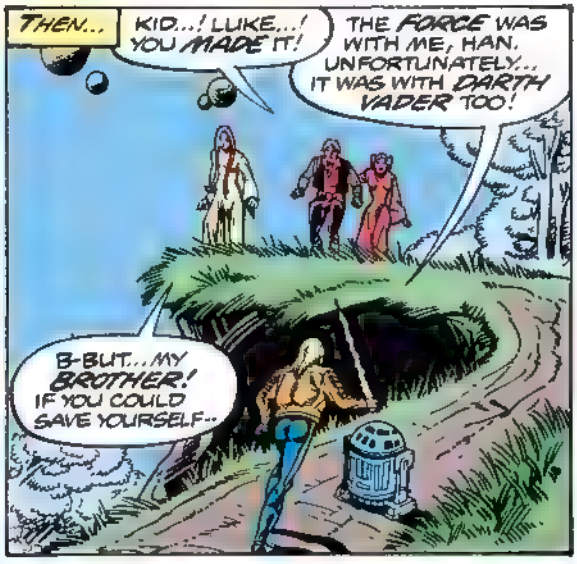

THEN, FROM OUT OF THE SURROUNDING CRYSTALS...
VADJOT DABIP WRRT
ARTOO?! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE MAKING YOUR WAY BACK TO THE FALCON!
NO ONE EVER HAD A MORE LOYAL FRIEND--
BUT I CAN'T AFFORD ANY DISTRACTION NOW--
--NOT WHEN I NEED ALL MY CONCENTRATION TO FINISH DARTH VADER!
THREEPIO ON THE LINKUP, SIR! ARTOO IS FRANTIC BECAUSE HIS SENSORY RECEPTORS DETECT SOMETHING--
--YOUR HUMAN VISION APPARENTLY CAN'T! HE FEARS--
MY MIND'S BEING CLOUDED BY THE FORCE! NOW THAT I'M NOT FIGHTING, I CAN SENSE IT! AND I CAN TELL--
AN ALARMED SCREECH ERUPTS FROM THE LITTLE DROID!
NO! THIS DOESN'T HAVE TO BE! DON'T MAKE ME--
THE LOOMING FIGURE'S LIGHTSABER SWINGS... AND LUKE HAS NO CHOICE!
WAAAMP
HIS ONLY DEFENSE IS... A FATAL THRUST!
THE SITH LORD'S TOWERING FORM SAGS... BEGINS TO FALL...

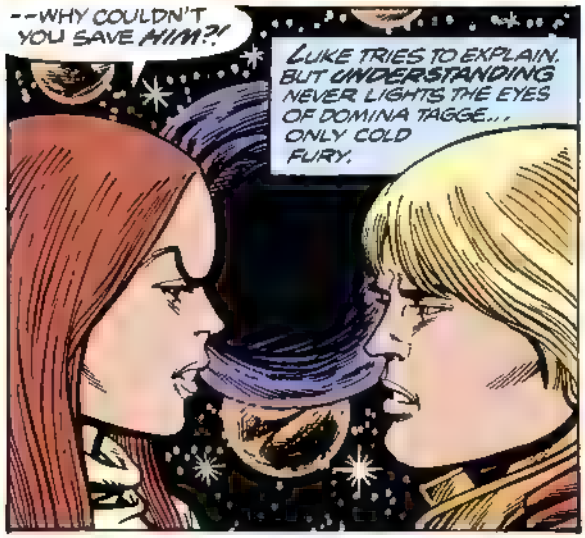

...BUT IT IS BARON ORMAN TAGGE WHO CRASHES TO THE GROUND!
I KNEW IT...! BUT I REALIZED IT TOO LATE! IT'S THE REASON I SENSED FEAR EARLIER! TAGGE DUELED ME BEFORE...* HE LOST THEN. HE FEARED IT MIGHT HAPPEN AGAIN!
B-BUT...THAT STILL DOESN'T EXPLAIN--
THE PURPOSE OF THE ILLUSION...? THE REASON HE WAS MADE TO FIGHT IN MY PLACE?
* STAR WARS #33 --ARCHIE.
IN PART, IT'S FINAL PUNISHMENT FOR ANY INCONVENIENCE HIS FOOLISH RIVALRY CAUSED ME--
YOU AND YOUR WAY WITH THE FORCE HAVE BEEN AN UNKNOWN FACTOR--
--A FACTOR THAT'S UPSET ME ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS.
--IN THE MAIN, IT DEMONSTRATES HOW FAR YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR DEPTH, NOVICE!
NO MORE, LUKE SKYWALKER! I'VE THOROUGHLY TESTED YOU... MADE YOU PERFORM IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT... PROBED YOUR EMOTIONS BY PLACING YOUR FRIENDS IN JEOPARDY. I NOW KNOW YOUR LIMITS...AND YOUR LIMITATIONS!
THEN YOU KNOW SOMETHING ELSE, I'M LEARNING...! I CAN CHANGE... I CAN GROW!
WHEN YOUR ONLY INSTRUCTOR IS DEAD... BY MY HANDS?
AN AMUSING NOTION, PUPPY. HAVE YOU THE COURAGE TO PURSUE IT?
COME! ONLY A FEW STEPS SEPARATE US.
I'LL GIVE YOU THE FIRST BLOW!
RAGE FLARES WITHIN LUKE. HE TENSES TO CHARGE, THEN INSTEAD... LEAPS BACK!
LOOK OUT, ARTOO! HE MEANT TO TRICK ME INTO THAT!
WHOOM!

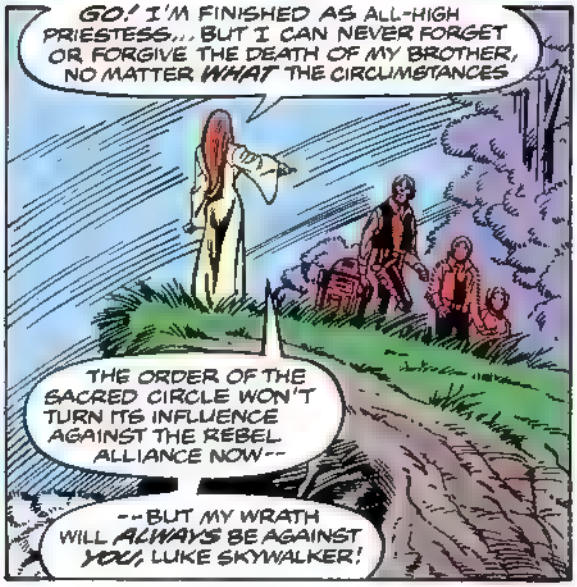
NOW I'LL SHOW WHAT I'VE LEARNED--
THE ONLY WAY TO WIN THIS BATTLE... IS TO STOP PLAYING DARTH VADER'S OWN GAME!
MOVE IT, LITTLE FRIEND... WE'RE GETTING OUT OF HERE!

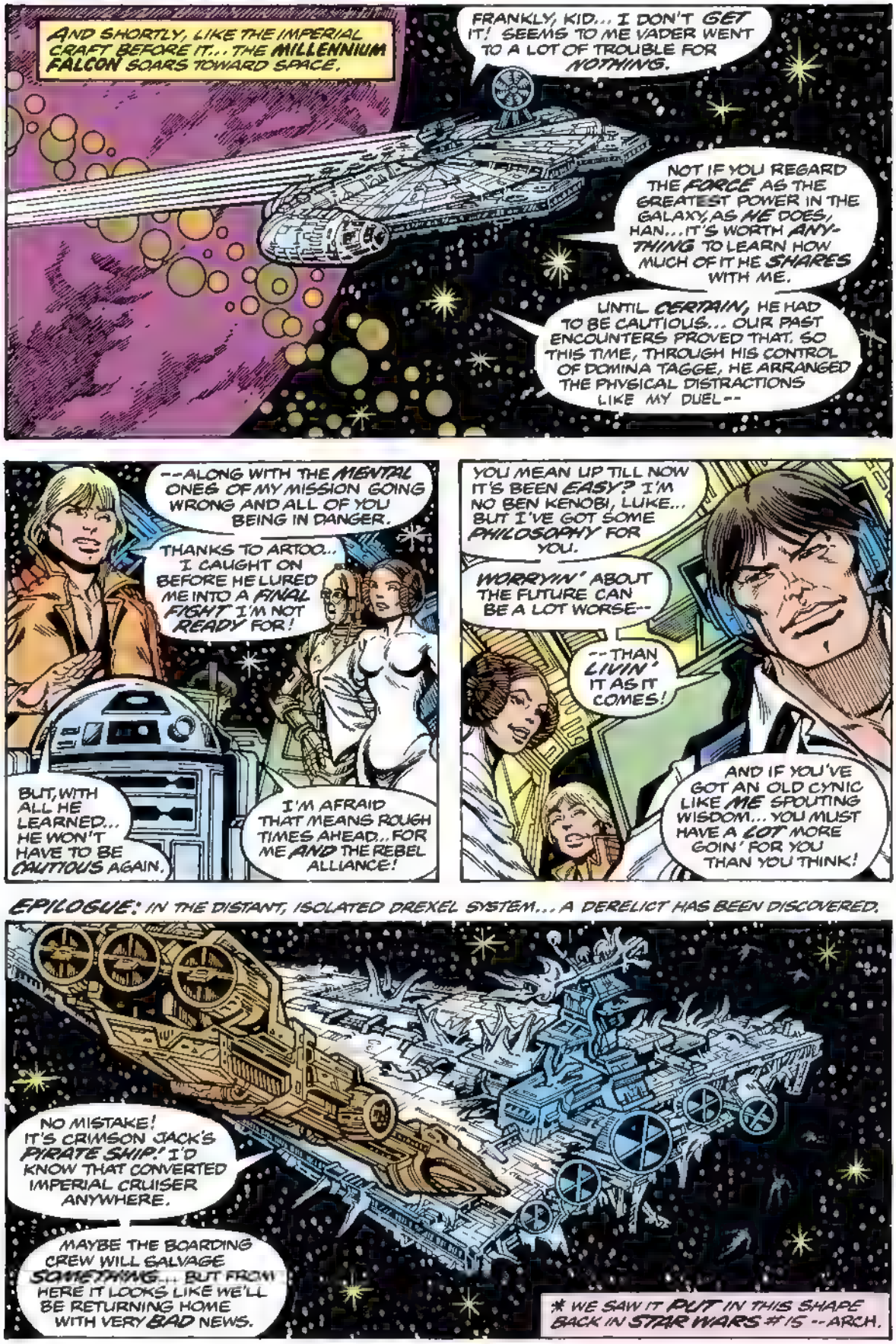

WHILE ABOVE THE VALLEY... INFORMATION HAS BEEN DELIVERED, INTENSE ARGUMENTS MADE!
YOU WASTE WORDS, LEIA ORGANA! THE SITH LORD MAY HAVE PLAYED ME FOR A FOOL AS YOU SAY--
BUT ALONG WITH MY BROTHER AND YOUR YOUNG REBEL--
--HE'S DOOMED HIMSELF! THERE'S NO WAY TO BRING AID INTO THE CRYSTAL FOREST... OR FOR HIM TO GET OUT!


SOMEONE FORGOT TO TELL VADER...!
THE UNIQUE TIE FIGHTER DISAPPEARS INTO THE HEAVENS, LEAVING SILENCE IN ITS WAKE... SOME SHOCKED, SOME ANGRY.


THEN...
KID...! LUKE...! YOU MADE IT!
THE FORCE WAS WITH ME, HAN. UNFORTUNATELY... IT WAS WITH DARTH VADER TOO!
B-BUT... MY BROTHER! IF YOU COULD SAVE YOURSELF...

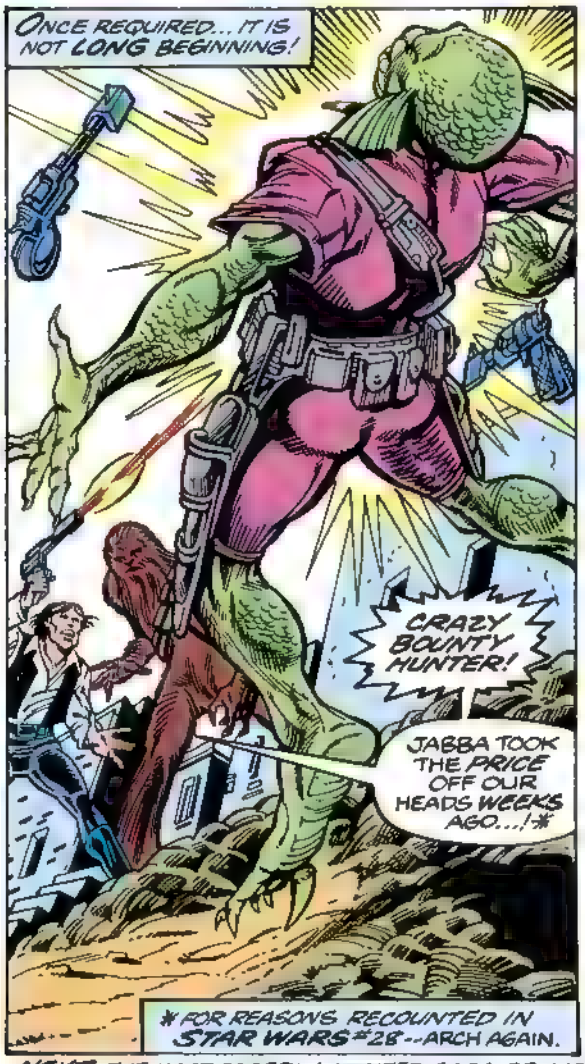

--WHY COULDN'T YOU SAVE HIM?!
LUKE TRIES TO EXPLAIN. BUT UNDERSTANDING NEVER LIGHTS THE EYES OF DOMINA TAGGE... ONLY COLD FURY.
LORD VADER'S CORRUPTIVE TOUCH RUNS DEEP. EVEN THE TRUTH CAN'T SHAKE IT.


GO! I'M FINISHED AS ALL-HIGH PRIESTESS... BUT I CAN NEVER FORGET OR FORGIVE THE DEATH OF MY BROTHER, NO MATTER WHAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES
THE ORDER OF THE SACRED CIRCLE WON'T TURN ITS INFLUENCE AGAINST THE REBEL ALLIANCE NOW--
--BUT MY WRATH WILL ALWAYS BE AGAINST YOU, LUKE SKYWALKER!

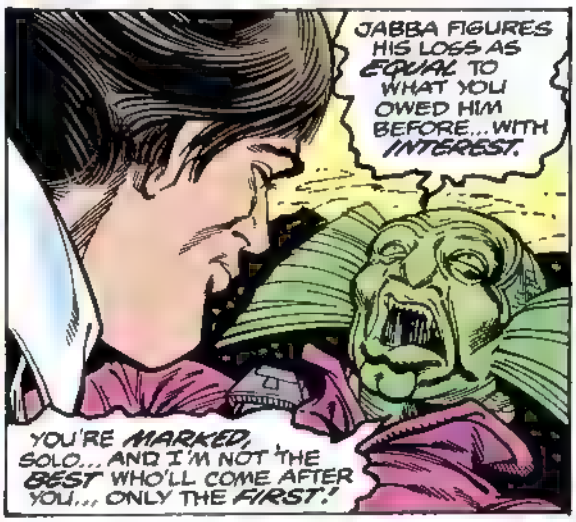

AND SHORTLY, LIKE THE IMPERIAL CRAFT BEFORE IT... THE MILLENNIUM FALCON SOARS TOWARD SPACE.
FRANKLY, KID... I DON'T GET IT! SEEMS TO ME VADER WENT TO A LOT OF TROUBLE FOR NOTHING.
NOT IF YOU REGARD THE FORCE AS THE GREATEST POWER IN THE GALAXY, AS HE DOES, HAN... IT'S WORTH ANY-THING TO LEARN HOW MUCH OF IT HE SHARES WITH ME.
UNTIL CERTAIN, HE HAD TO BE CAUTIOUS... OUR PAST ENCOUNTERS PROVED THAT. SO THIS TIME, THROUGH HIS CONTROL OF DOMINA TAGGE, HE ARRANGED THE PHYSICAL DISTRACTIONS LIKE MY DUEL--
--ALONG WITH THE MENTAL ONES OF MY MISSION GOING WRONG AND ALL OF YOU BEING IN DANGER.
THANKS TO ARTOO... I CAUGHT ON BEFORE HE LURED ME INTO A FINAL FIGHT I'M NOT READY FOR!
BUT, WITH ALL HE LEARNED... HE WON'T HAVE TO BE CAUTIOUS AGAIN.
I'M AFRAID THAT MEANS ROUGH TIMES AHEAD... FOR ME AND THE REBEL ALLIANCE!
YOU MEAN UP TILL NOW IT'S BEEN EASY? I'M NO BEN KENOBI, LUKE... BUT I'VE GOT SOME PHILOSOPHY FOR YOU.
WORRYIN' ABOUT THE FUTURE CAN BE A LOT WORSE--
--THAN LIVIN' IT AS IT COMES!
AND IF YOU'VE GOT AN OLD CYNIC LIKE ME SPOUTING WISDOM... YOU MUST HAVE A LOT MORE GOIN' FOR YOU THAN YOU THINK!
EPILOGUE: IN THE DISTANT, ISOLATED DREXEL SYSTEM... A DERELICT HAS BEEN DISCOVERED.
NO MISTAKE! IT'S CRIMSON JACK'S PIRATE SHIP! I'D KNOW THAT CONVERTED IMPERIAL CRUISER ANYWHERE.
MAYBE THE BOARDING CREW WILL SALVAGE SOMETHING... BUT FROM HERE IT LOOKS LIKE WE'LL BE RETURNING HOME WITH VERY BAD NEWS.
* WE SAW IT PUT IN THIS SHAPE BACK IN STAR WARS #15 -- ARCH.

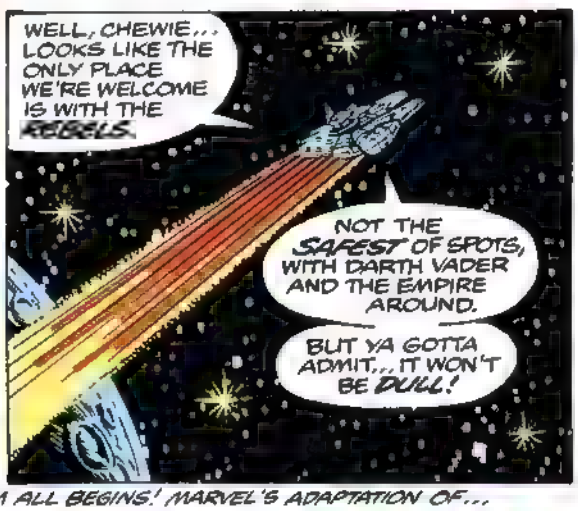
AND ONE RECIPIENT OF THAT BAD NEWS IS... JABBA THE HUT!
BLAM
I WAS A BACKER WHO HELPED JACK REFIT THAT CRUISER!
A MAJOR INVESTMENT DESTROYED...! INCLUDING ITS TREASURE HOLDS!

AT LEAST THE SHIP'S LOG SURVIVED... AND MAKES CLEAR WHO DID THIS!
HARD TO BELIEVE ONE MAN COULD CONTINUALLY BRING ME SO MUCH GRIEF! HARSH ACTION IS REQUIRED!


ONCE REQUIRED... IT IS NOT LONG BEGINNING!
CRAZY BOUNTY HUNTER!
JABBA TOOK THE PRICE OFF OUR HEADS WEEKS AGO...!*
* FOR REASONS RECOUNTED IN STAR WARS #28--ARCH AGAIN.

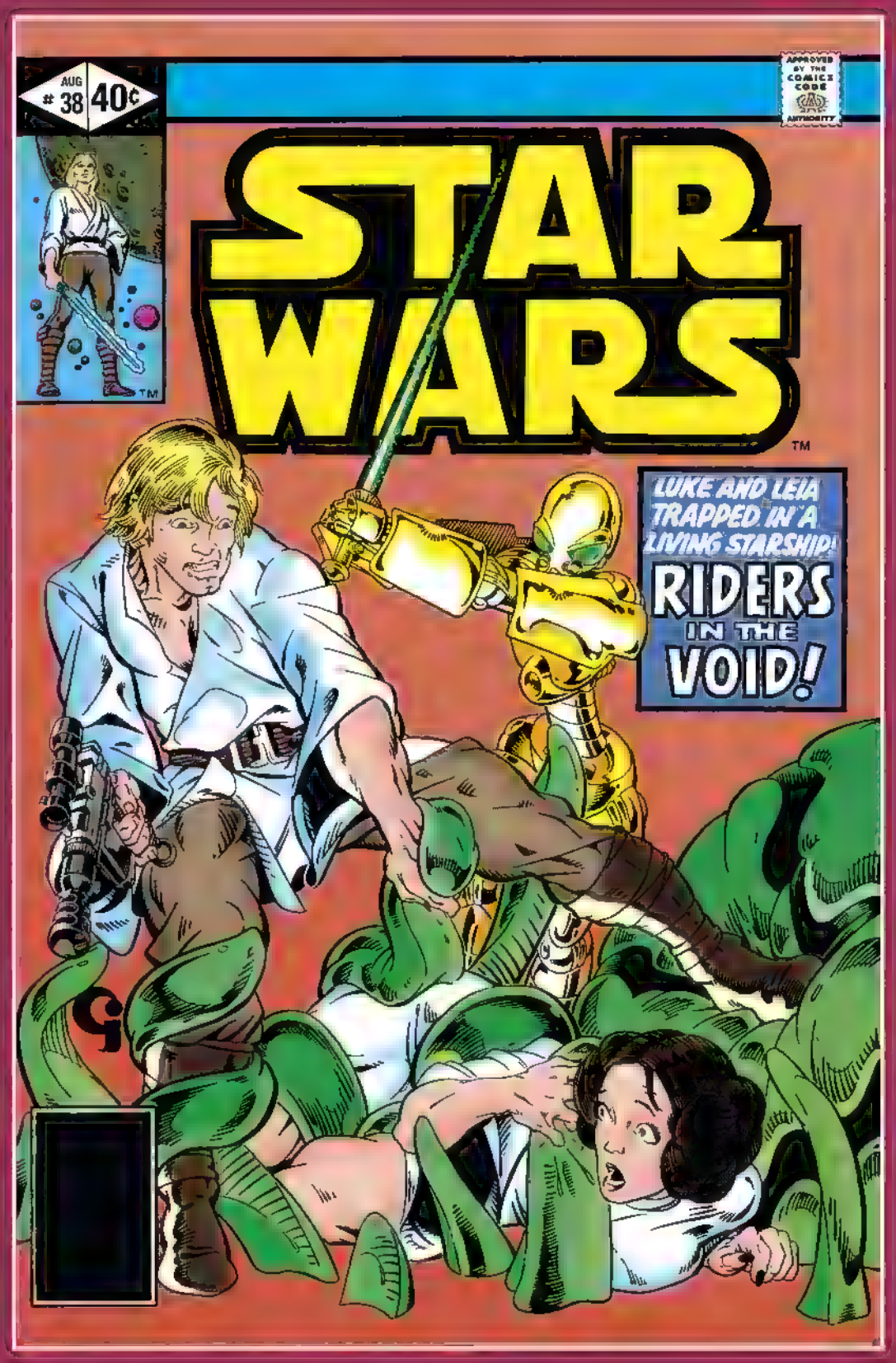
AND THE DYING ASSASSIN TELLS HIS WOULD-BE TARGET WHY HE'S HUNTED ONCE MORE.


JABBA FIGURES HIS LOSS AS EQUAL TO WHAT YOU OWED HIM BEFORE... WITH INTEREST.
YOU'RE MARKED, SOLO... AND I'M NOT THE BEST WHO'LL COME AFTER YOU... ONLY THE FIRST!


WELL, CHEWIE... LOOKS LIKE THE ONLY PLACE WE'RE WELCOME IS WITH THE REBELS.
NOT THE SAFEST OF SPOTS, WITH DARTH VADER AND THE EMPIRE AROUND.
BUT YA GOTTA ADMIT... IT WON'T BE DULL!

NEXT: THE MOST EAGERLY AWAITED SAGA OF THEM ALL BEGINS! MARVEL'S ADAPTATION OF...

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK!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STAR WARS
TM
LUKE AND LEIA TRAPPED IN A LIVING STARSHIP!
RIDERS IN THE VOID!

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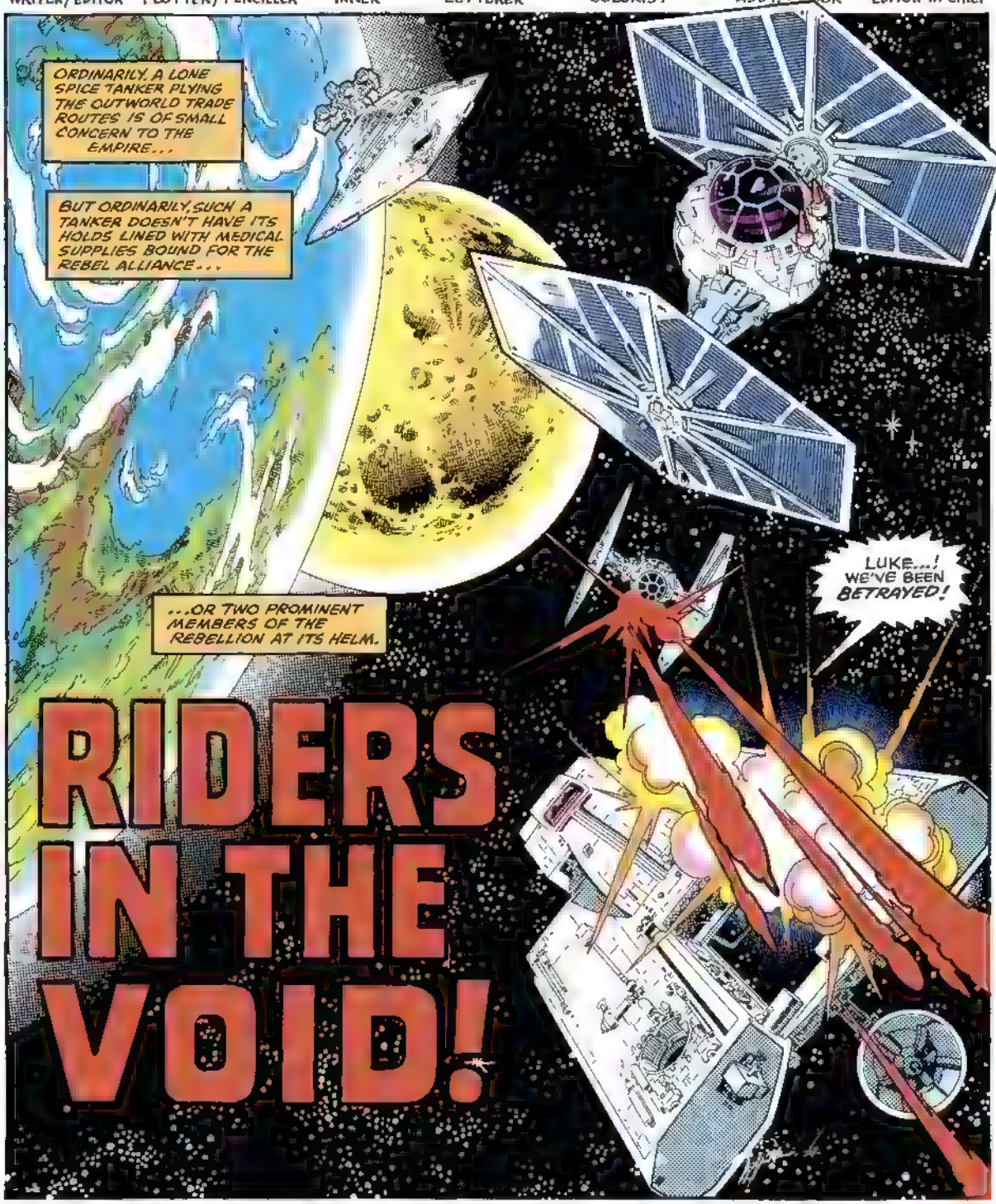
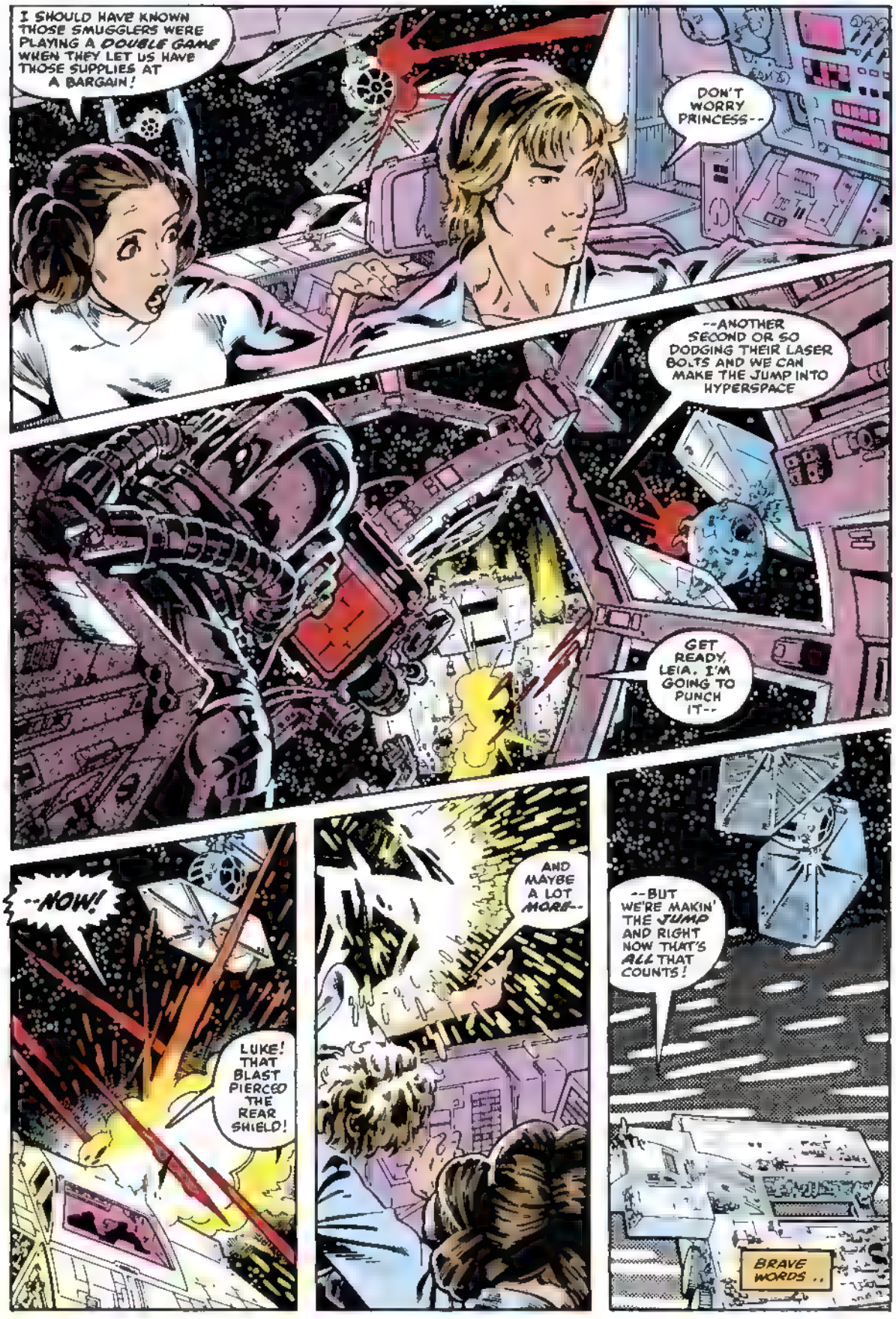
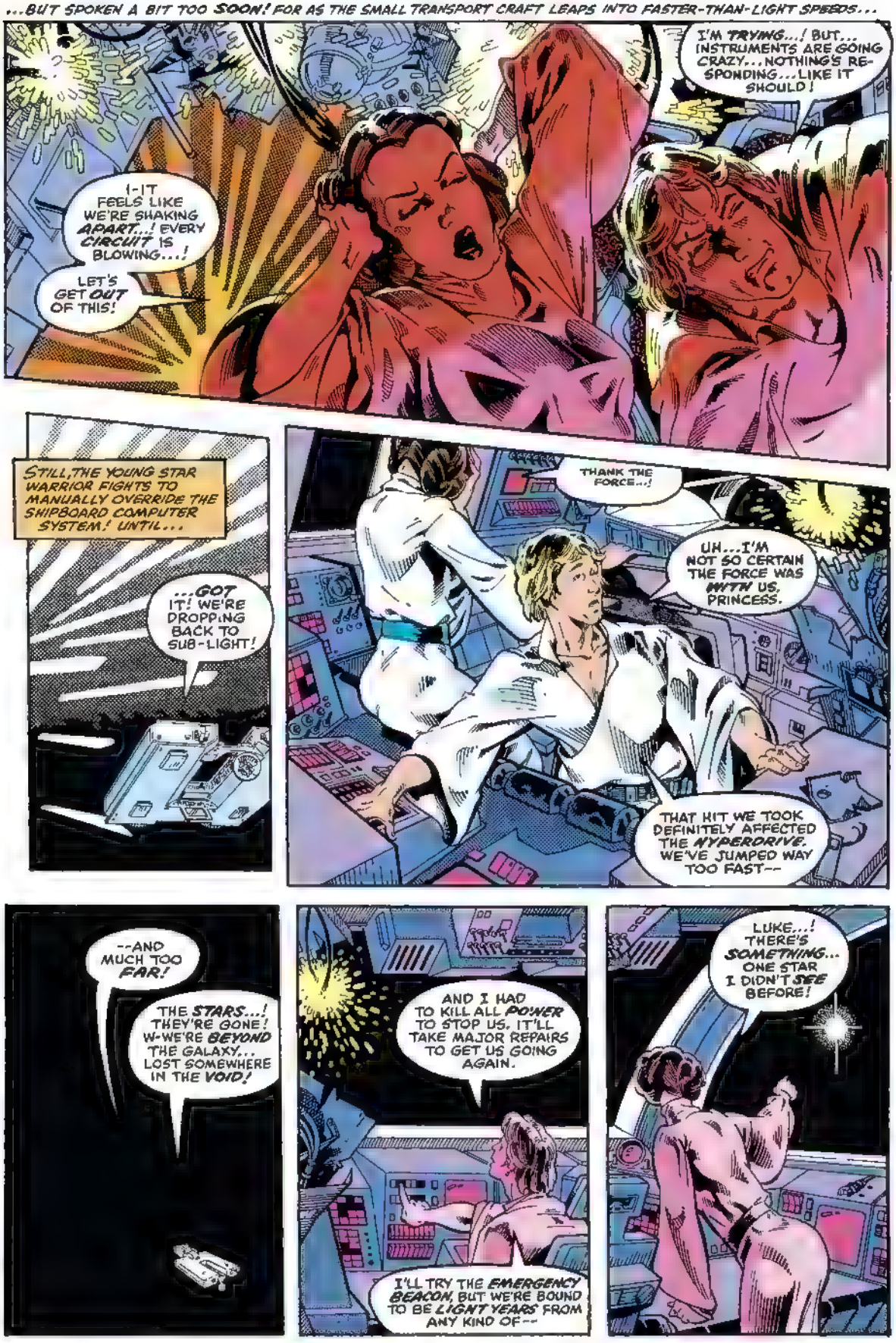
CONTINUING THE SAGA BEGUN IN THE FILM BY GEORGE LUCAS RELEASED BY TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX

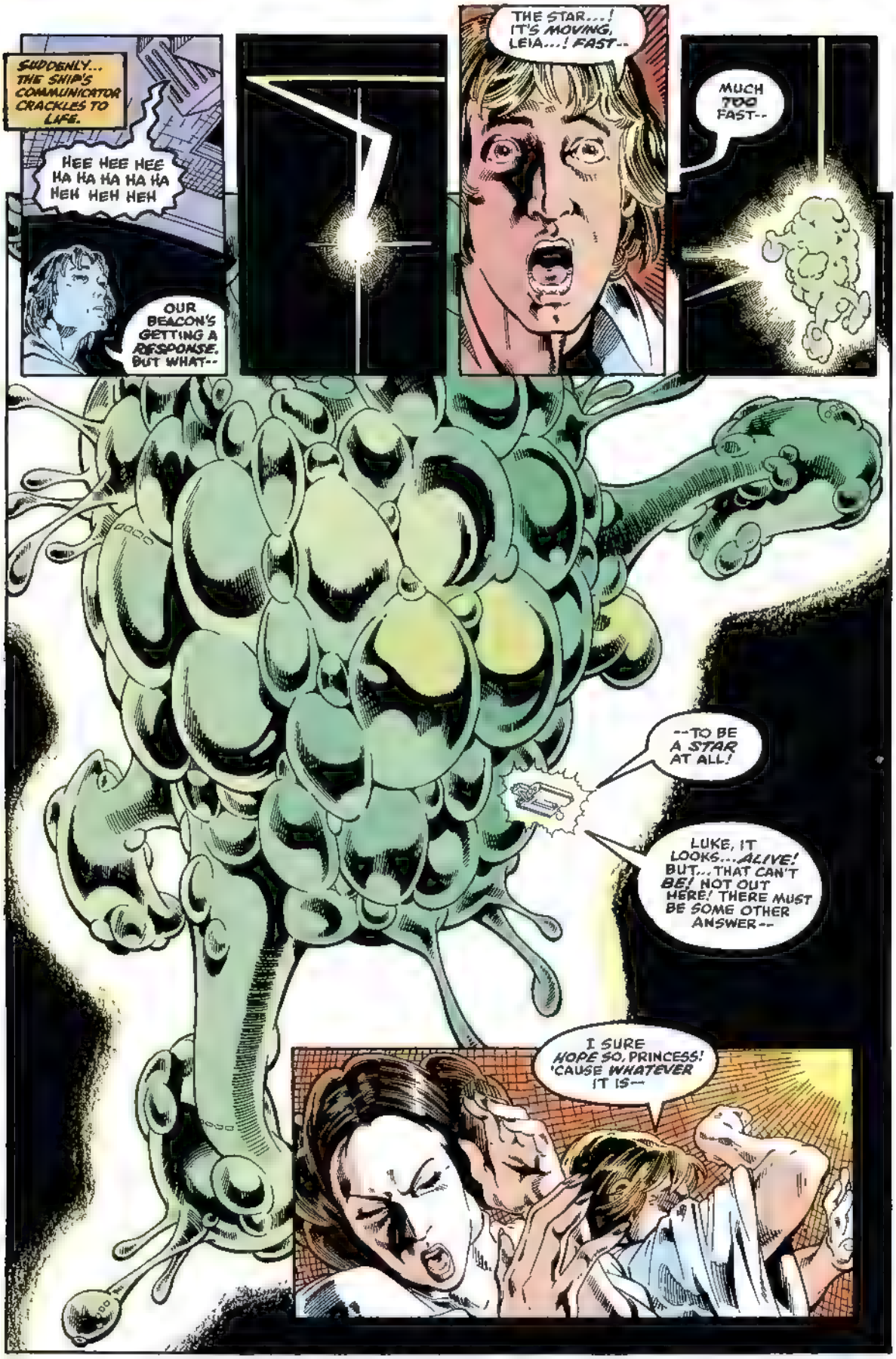
ARCHIE GOODWIN	MICHAEL GOLDEN	TERRY AUSTIN	JOE ROSEN	MICHAEL GOLDEN	DANNY FINGEROTH	JIM SHOOTER
WRITER/EDITOR	PLOTTER/PENCILLER	INKER	LETTERER	COLORIST	ASST. EDITOR	EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

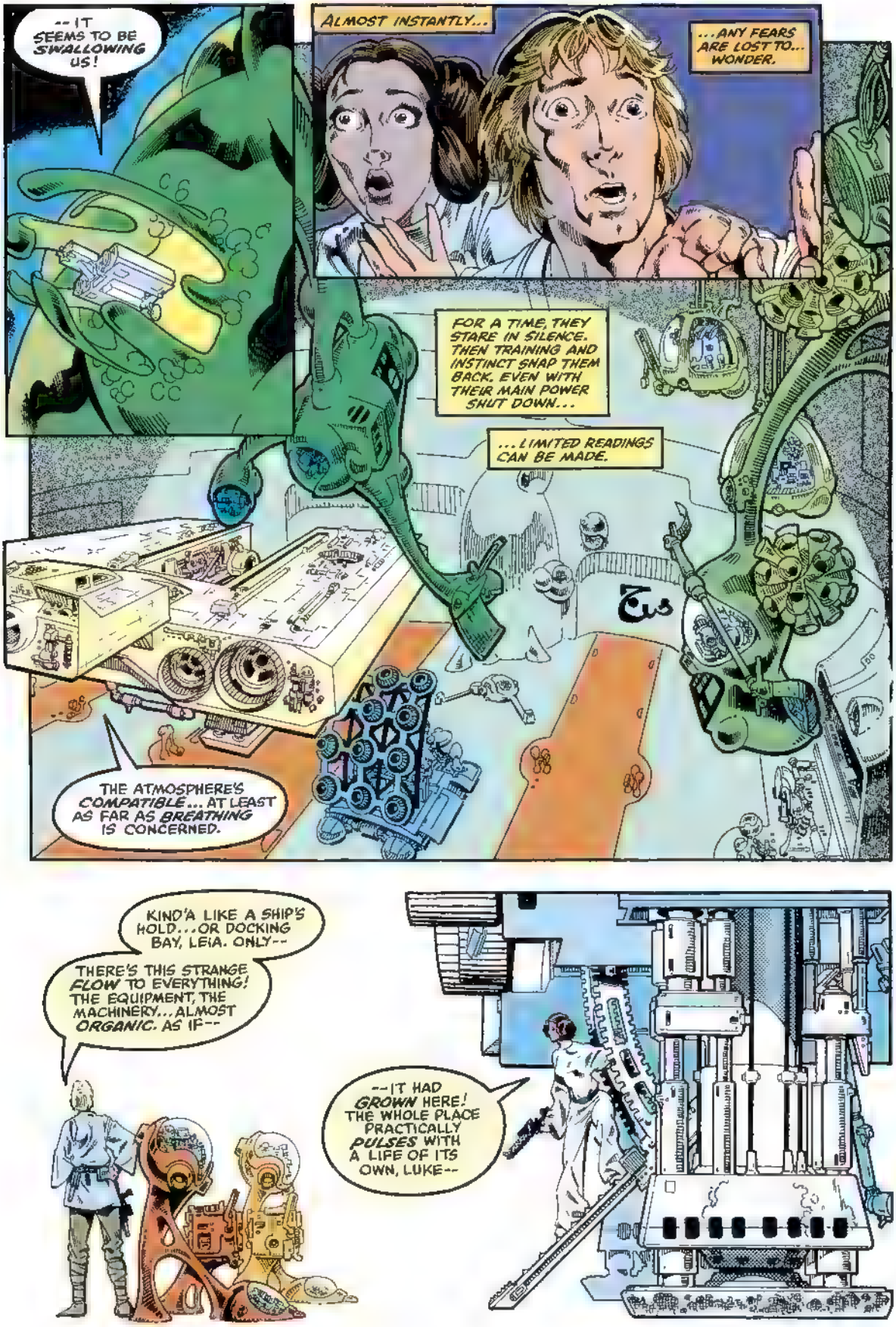

ORDINARILY, A LONE SPICE TANKER PLYING THE OUTWORLD TRADE ROUTES IS OF SMALL CONCERN TO THE EMPIRE...
BUT ORDINARILY, SUCH A TANKER DOESN'T HAVE ITS HOLDS LINED WITH MEDICAL SUPPLIES BOUND FOR THE REBEL ALLIANCE...
...OR TWO PROMINENT MEMBERS OF THE REBELLION AT ITS HELM.
LUKE...! WE'VE BEEN BETRAYED!
RIDERS IN THE VOID!


I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THOSE SMUGGLERS WERE PLAYING A DOUBLE GAME WHEN THEY LET US HAVE THOSE SUPPLIES AT A BARGAIN!
DON'T WORRY PRINCESS--
--ANOTHER SECOND OR SO DODGING THEIR LASER BOLTS AND WE CAN MAKE THE JUMP INTO HYPERSPACE
GET READY, LEIA. I'M GOING TO PUNCH IT--
--NOW!
LUKE! THAT BLAST PIERCED THE REAR SHIELD!
AND MAYBE A LOT MORE--
--BUT WE'RE MAKIN' THE JUMP AND RIGHT NOW THAT'S ALL THAT COUNTS!
BRAVE WORDS..

...BUT SPOKEN A BIT TOO **SOON!** FOR AS THE SMALL TRANSPORT CRAFT LEAPS INTO FASTER-THAN-LIGHT SPEEDS...

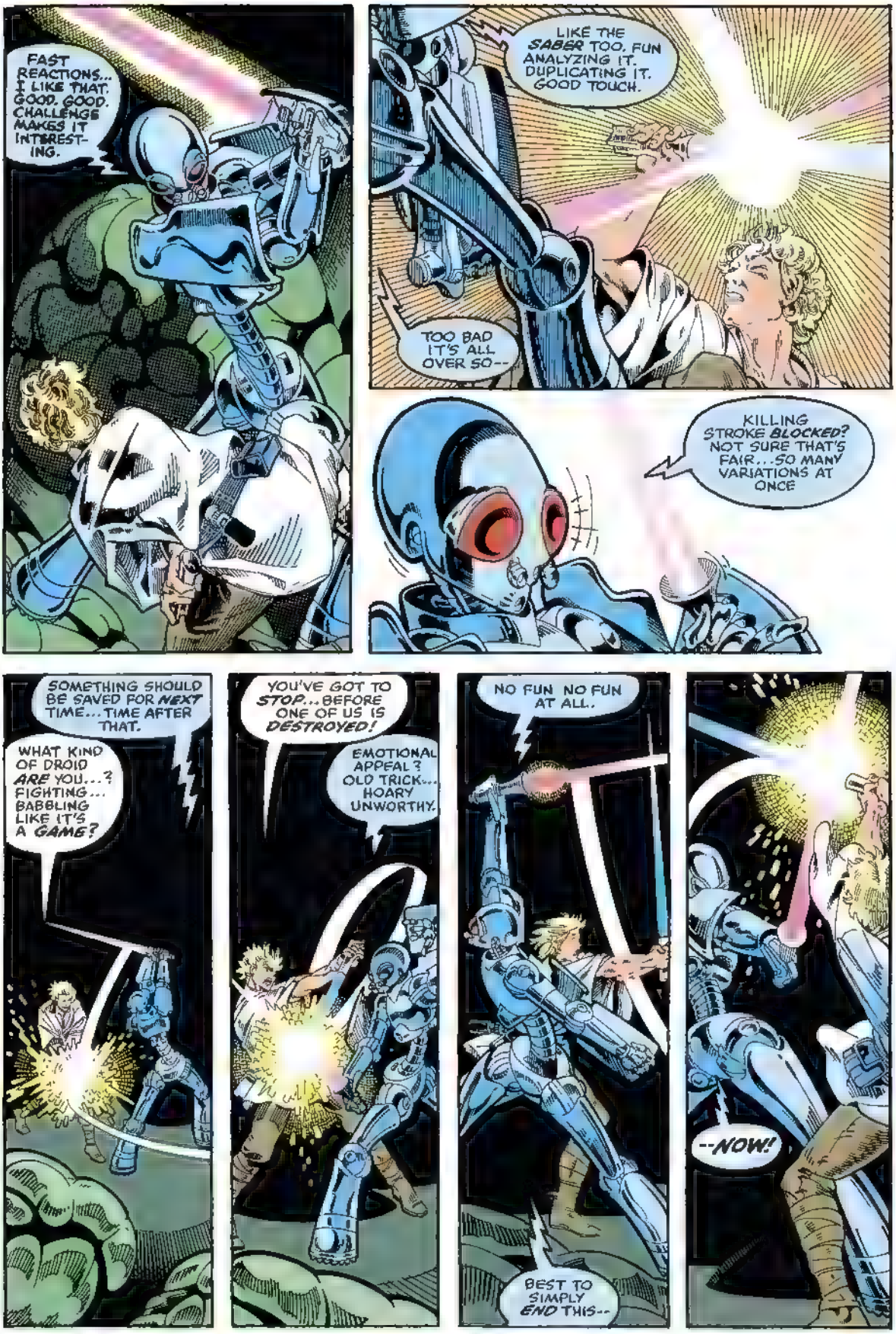

I-IT FEELS LIKE WE'RE SHAKING *APART...!* EVERY *CIRCUIT* IS BLOWING...!
LET'S GET *OUT* OF THIS!
I'M *TRYING...!* BUT... INSTRUMENTS ARE GOING CRAZY... NOTHING'S RESPONDING... LIKE IT SHOULD!
STILL, THE YOUNG STAR WARRIOR FIGHTS TO MANUALLY OVERRIDE THE SHIPBOARD COMPUTER SYSTEM! UNTIL...
...*GOT* IT! WE'RE DROPPING BACK TO SUB-LIGHT!
THANK THE FORCE...!
UH... I'M NOT SO CERTAIN THE FORCE WAS *WITH* US, PRINCESS.
THAT HIT WE TOOK DEFINITELY AFFECTED THE *HYPERDRIVE.* WE'VE JUMPED WAY TOO FAST--
--AND MUCH TOO *FAR!*
THE *STARS...!* THEY'RE GONE! W-WE'RE *BEYOND* THE GALAXY... LOST SOMEWHERE IN THE *VOID!*
AND I HAD TO KILL ALL *POWER* TO STOP US. IT'LL TAKE MAJOR REPAIRS TO GET US GOING AGAIN.
I'LL TRY THE *EMERGENCY BEACON,* BUT WE'RE BOUND TO BE *LIGHT YEARS* FROM ANY KIND OF--
LUKE...! THERE'S *SOMETHING...* ONE STAR I DIDN'T *SEE* BEFORE!


SUDDENLY... THE SHIP'S COMMUNICATOR CRACKLES TO LIFE.
HEE HEE HEE HA HA HA HA HA HEH HEH HEH
OUR BEACON'S GETTING A RESPONSE. BUT WHAT--
THE STAR...! IT'S MOVING, LEIA...! FAST--
MUCH TOO FAST--
--TO BE A STAR AT ALL!
LUKE, IT LOOKS...ALIVE! BUT...THAT CAN'T BE! NOT OUT HERE! THERE MUST BE SOME OTHER ANSWER--
I SURE HOPE SO, PRINCESS! 'CAUSE WHATEVER IT IS--

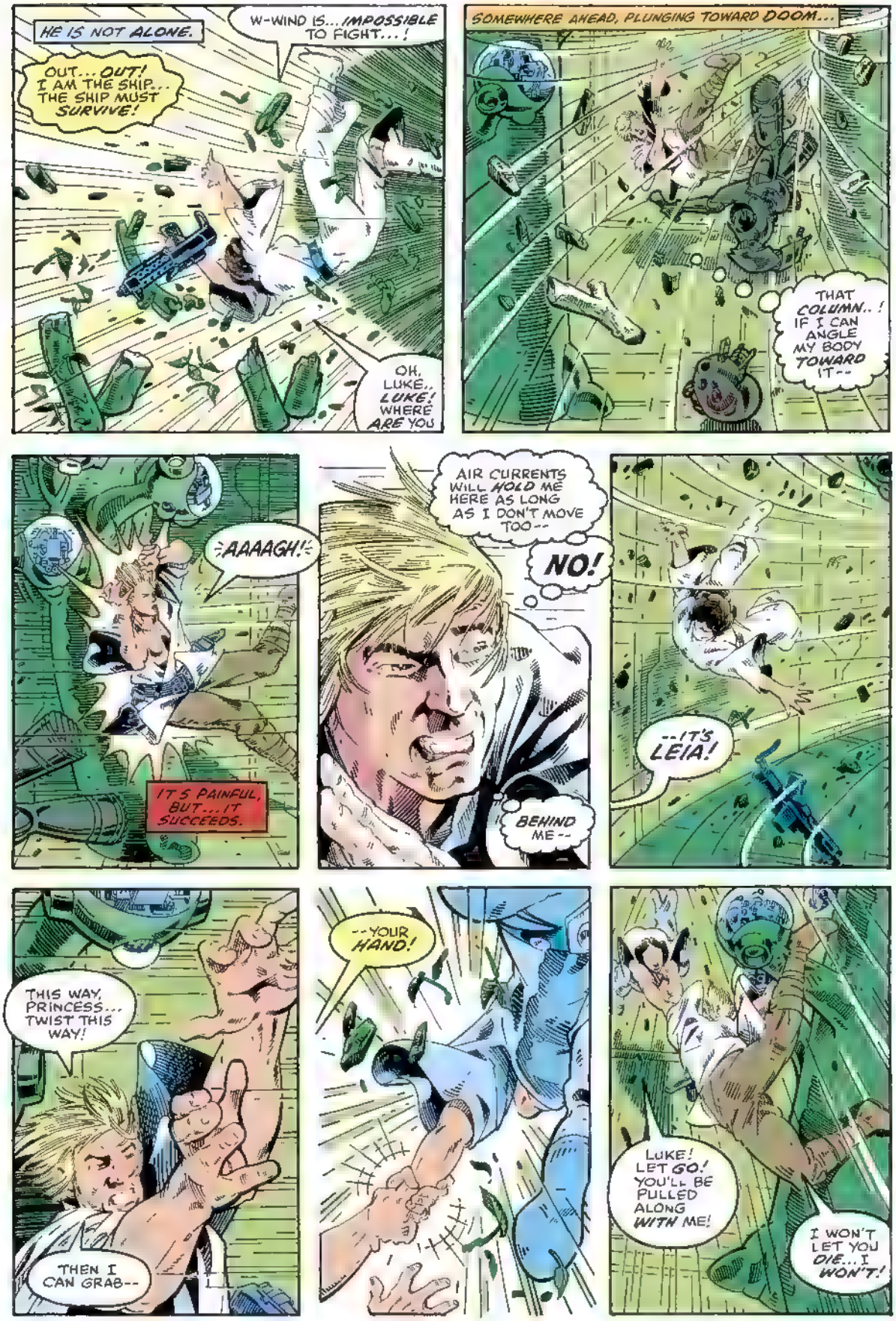

--IT SEEMS TO BE SWALLOWING US!
ALMOST INSTANTLY...
...ANY FEARS ARE LOST TO... WONDER.
FOR A TIME, THEY STARE IN SILENCE. THEN TRAINING AND INSTINCT SNAP THEM BACK. EVEN WITH THEIR MAIN POWER SHUT DOWN...
...LIMITED READINGS CAN BE MADE.
THE ATMOSPHERE'S COMPATIBLE... AT LEAST AS FAR AS BREATHING IS CONCERNED.
KIND'A LIKE A SHIP'S HOLD...OR DOCKING BAY, LEIA. ONLY--
THERE'S THIS STRANGE FLOW TO EVERYTHING! THE EQUIPMENT, THE MACHINERY...ALMOST ORGANIC. AS IF--
--IT HAD GROWN HERE! THE WHOLE PLACE PRACTICALLY PULSES WITH A LIFE OF ITS OWN, LUKE--

--AND THOUGH IT MAY SOUND JUST A TOUCH PROVINCIAL FOR A FORMER SENATOR AND A SEASONED INTERGALACTIC TRAVELER--
-- I DON'T LIKE IT.
IN FACT, I GET A VERY UNCOMFORTABLE FEELING OF BEING WATCHED... OR STUDIED.
WELL, SOMETHING DEFINITELY BROUGHT US HERE. BUT IF ITS PURPOSE WAS TO HARM US--
--IT SURELY WOULD'VE DONE IT BEFORE NOW.
HAHAHAHAHAHA
THE LAUGHTER SEEMS TO FLOW ALL AROUND THEM...
AND THEN...
...THE MADNESS BEGINS.
LEIAAAAAA
LUKE! WHERE ARE YOU? LUKE?!

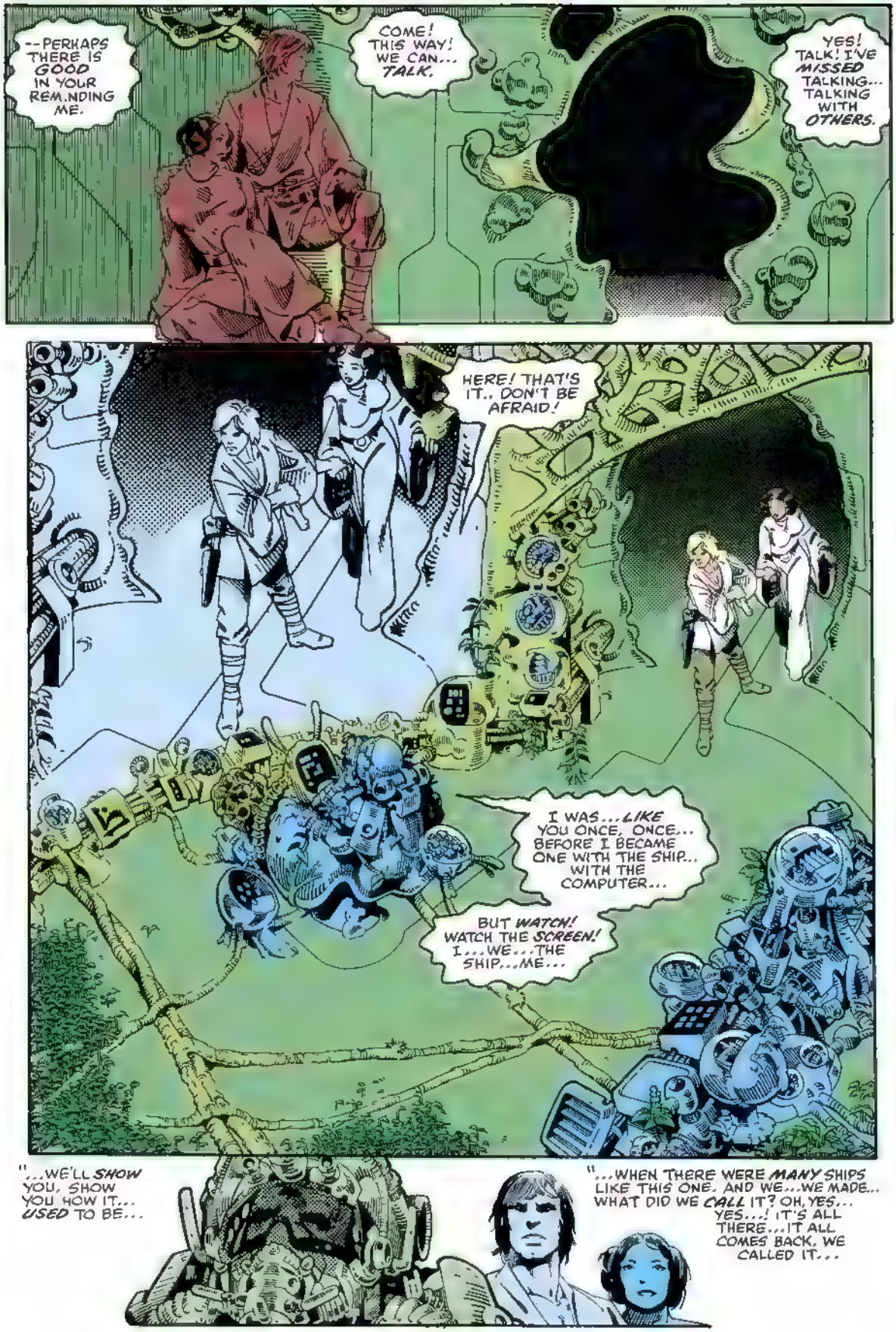
ALL RIGHT, LEIA ORGANA... CALMLY DOES IT.
IF OUR LAUGHING HOST THINKS YOU'RE MORE VULNERABLE SEPARATED FROM LUKE, HE, SHE, OR IT BETTER--
HEEHEEHEEHEEHEEHEE
THE FALL ENDS AS ALL FALLS MUST... WITH IMPACT,
CUSHIONED...
...BUT ALL THE SAME, STUNNING.
STILL, HE IS YOUNG, HIS BODY IS STRONG...
...AND HIS SENSES ARE HONED BY THE WAYS OF THE FORCE.
W- WHO.. ?
SHRAAAAKK!


FAST REACTIONS... I LIKE THAT. GOOD. GOOD. CHALLENGE MAKES IT INTEREST-ING.
LIKE THE SABER TOO. FUN ANALYZING IT. DUPLICATING IT. GOOD TOUCH.
TOO BAD IT'S ALL OVER SO--
KILLING STROKE BLOCKED? NOT SURE THAT'S FAIR...SO MANY VARIATIONS AT ONCE
SOMETHING SHOULD BE SAVED FOR NEXT TIME... TIME AFTER THAT.
WHAT KIND OF DROID ARE YOU...? FIGHTING... BABBLING LIKE IT'S A GAME?
YOU'VE GOT TO STOP... BEFORE ONE OF US IS DESTROYED!
EMOTIONAL APPEAL? OLD TRICK... HOARY UNWORTHY.
NO FUN NO FUN AT ALL..
BEST TO SIMPLY END THIS--
--NOW!

I--IT NEARLY DID! SEEMS TO ANALYZE AND ADJUST CONSTANTLY TO MY MOVES--
--AND THE LONGER WE BATTLE, THE BETTER IT GETS!
I WON'T BE ALIVE TO HELP LEIA... IF I DON'T DO SOMETHING FAST!
A MISSED STROKE! YOU WOULDN'T LEAVE YOURSELF OPEN LIKE THAT UNLESS--
HESITATION, SUSPICION OF DECEIT. NO LONGER THAN A HEARTBEAT...
...BUT LONG ENOUGH FOR LUKE TO WHIRL... AND WIN!
THE DROID DIES..
...BUT THE VOICE WHICH SPOKE THROUGH IT STILL SCREAMS ON.
IMPOSSIBLE! IMPOSSIBLE! IT'S NOT IN THE PROGRAMMING FOR YOU TO WIN. ONLY IF--
YOU'RE REAL! YOU EXIST! ENEMIES! ENEMIES! ENEMIES IN THE SHIP!
THE SHRIEKING SOUNDS THROUGHOUT THE MECHO-ORGANIC VESSEL, RISING IN VOLUME, IN SHEER HYSTERIA.
THE SHIP IS MINE... THE SHIP IS ME!
NO ONE ELSE BELONGS! NO ONE! NO ONE!
A BREACH OPENS TO THE VACUUM OF SPACE...
...SUCKING OUT ATMOSPHERE WITH HURRICANE FURY, AND CAUGHT WITHIN THE HOWLING GALE...
...LUKE IS PULLED TOWARD THE AIRLESS VOID SOMEWHERE BEYOND!


HE IS NOT ALONE.
W-WIND IS... IMPOSSIBLE TO FIGHT...!
OUT... OUT! I AM THE SHIP... THE SHIP MUST SURVIVE!
OH, LUKE... LUKE! WHERE ARE YOU
SOMEWHERE AHEAD, PLUNGING TOWARD DOOM...
THAT COLUMN..! IF I CAN ANGLE MY BODY TOWARD IT--
AAAAGH!
IT'S PAINFUL, BUT... IT SUCCEEDS.
AIR CURRENTS WILL HOLD ME HERE AS LONG AS I DON'T MOVE TOO--
NO!
BEHIND ME--
--IT'S LEIA!
THIS WAY, PRINCESS... TWIST THIS WAY!
THEN I CAN GRAB--
--YOUR HAND!
LUKE! LET GO! YOU'LL BE PULLED ALONG WITH ME!
I WON'T LET YOU DIE... I WON'T!

PLEASE, LUKE...! SAVE YOURSELF! PLEASE!
NO!
I LOVE YOU, LEIA--
I CAN'T LOSE YOU! I--
YOU'RE SLIPPING!
LUKE...! I-IT'S... NO... USE...!
TRUE.
EXCEPT...
...OTHER FORCES ARE INVOLVED.
FORCES STRANGE...AND SEEMINGLY WHIMSICAL.
I DON'T BELIEVE IT...! ONE MOMENT WE'RE ON THE VERGE OF DEATH--
--THE NEXT, EVERYTHING STOPS! AS IF IT NEVER HAPPENED!
INSANITY...!
'LEAST IT'S WORKING IN OUR FAVOR NOW. BUT I CAN'T FIGURE WHY--
YOU...CARE FOR EACH OTHER. I HAD FORGOTTEN ABOUT SUCH... CARING. I'VE FORGOTTEN MANY THINGS--


--PERHAPS THERE IS GOOD IN YOUR REM.NDING ME.
COME! THIS WAY! WE CAN... TALK.
YES! TALK! I'VE MISSED TALKING... TALKING WITH OTHERS.
HERE! THAT'S IT.. DON'T BE AFRAID!
I WAS... LIKE YOU ONCE, ONCE... BEFORE I BECAME ONE WITH THE SHIP... WITH THE COMPUTER...
BUT WATCH! WATCH THE SCREEN! I... WE... THE SHIP... ME...
"...WE'LL SHOW YOU, SHOW YOU HOW IT... USED TO BE...
"...WHEN THERE WERE MANY SHIPS LIKE THIS ONE. AND WE... WE MADE... WHAT DID WE CALL IT? OH, YES... YES...! IT'S ALL THERE... IT ALL COMES BACK, WE CALLED IT...

"...WAR.
"BUT ONE BY ONE, THE SHIPS DESTROYED EACH OTHER...
"UNTIL, AFTER ONE LAST BATTLE... ONLY MY SHIP SURVIVED. THE WAR WAS OVER.
"MY CREW AND I CAME HOME VICTORS, ONLY TO FIND...
"...AS A FINAL GESTURE, OUR ENEMY HAD RELEASED A PLAGUE BOMB.
"THERE WAS NO ONE LEFT. FAMILIES, FRIENDS, EVERY LAST SOUL... DEAD. AND THE PLAGUE WAS STILL ACTIVE. IT CONTAINED CORROSIVE AGENTS WHICH COULD PENETRATE SPACE ARMOR. I MADE IT BACK TO THE SHIP IN TIME. NO ONE ELSE DID
"I FLED, SOMEONE HAD TO SURVIVE. OTHERWISE... IT ALL MEANT NOTHING. THE PLAGUE COULD SPREAD FROM PLANET TO PLANET THROUGHOUT MY GALAXY. I HAD TO GO BEYOND...OUTSIDE. THE SHIP AND I... RIDING... RIDING THROUGH THE VOID..."
WE FUSED IN TIME... THE COMPUTER, THE SHIP, AND I. MY CONSCIOUSNESS SYMBIOTICALLY LINKED TO ITS ORGANIC, SELF-PERPETUATING CONTROL SYSTEMS.
ALL OF US RIDING... ENDLESSLY RIDING... AWAY FROM PLAGUES. TIME IS NOTHING AND WE HAVE OUR GAMES, OUR--
LUKE... ON THE SCREEN! THAT'S--
-- OUR GALAXY! WHILE HE'S BEEN TALKING, WE'VE BEEN TRAVELING BACK!
PERHAPS. PERHAPS. OR PERHAPS IT'S AN AMUSEMENT THE COMPUTER IS CREATING.
WHAT...?!
OUR GAMES! THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT YOU TWO WERE. THAT'S WHAT THIS MAY BE.
NO! IT'S STILL THERE AS WE DROP OUT OF HYPERDRIVE. IT'S REAL... IT'S OUR HOME!

AND HOME, UNFORTUNATELY, IS WHERE THE GALACTIC EMPIRE AND ITS AGENTS WAIT.
THAT'S IT, CAPTAIN! THE HUGE MASS THAT'S HAD OUR SCANNERS GOING WILD.
APPEARING IN NEARLY THE SAME SPOT WHERE WE LOST THOSE REBELS EARLIER...!

IT CAN'T BE COINCIDENCE! THIS IS SOME MONSTROUS TRICK OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE!
W-WE'RE GETTING CONFUSED LIFE READINGS, S.R. AND ON THE COMMUNICATOR--
--THERE'S LAUGHTER. INSANE LAUGHTER!

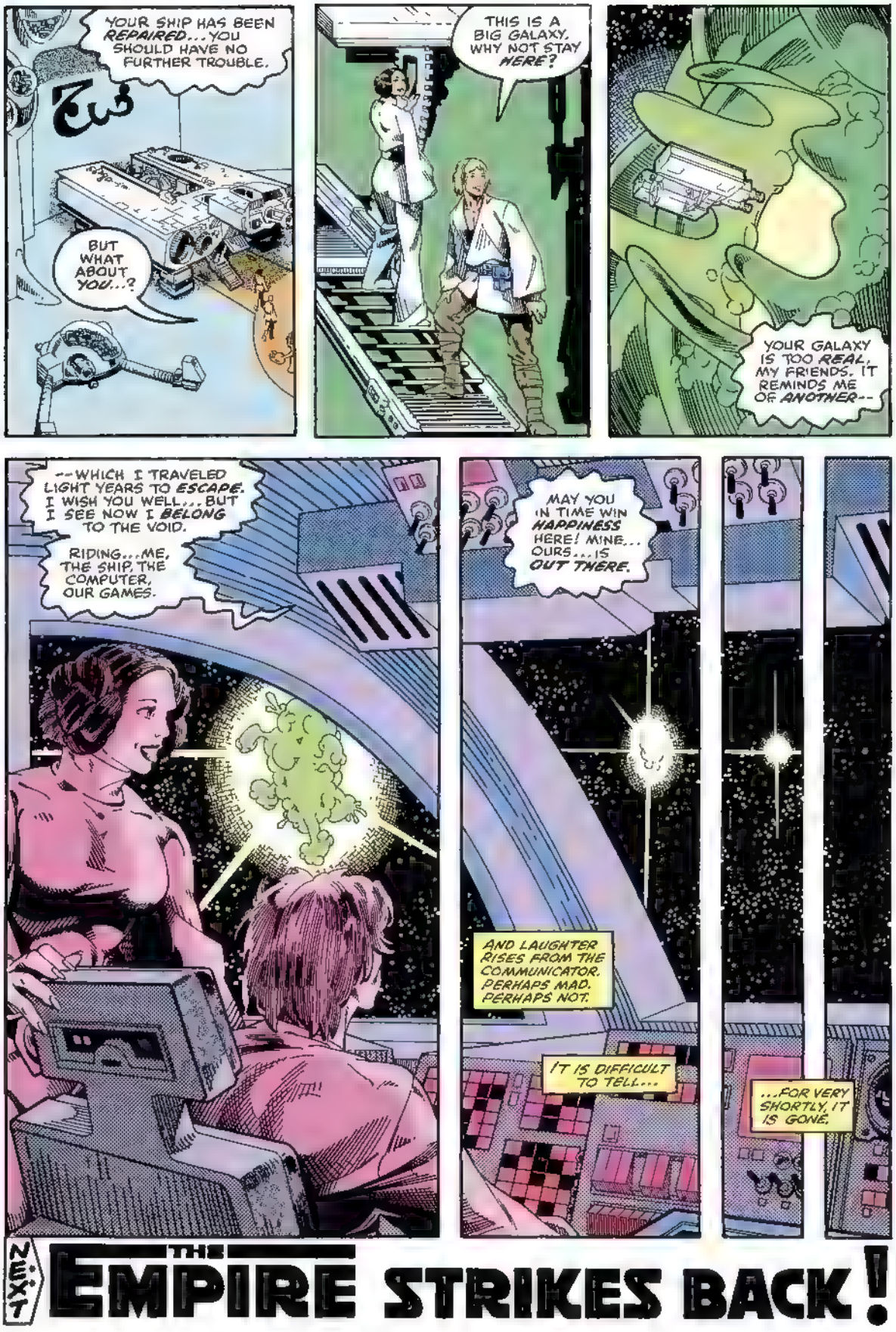
LEIA! THAT'S THE IMPERIAL CRUISER THAT WAS PURSUING US BEFORE!
SHIP...! YOU'RE IN DANGER! GET OUT OF HERE OR ELSE--

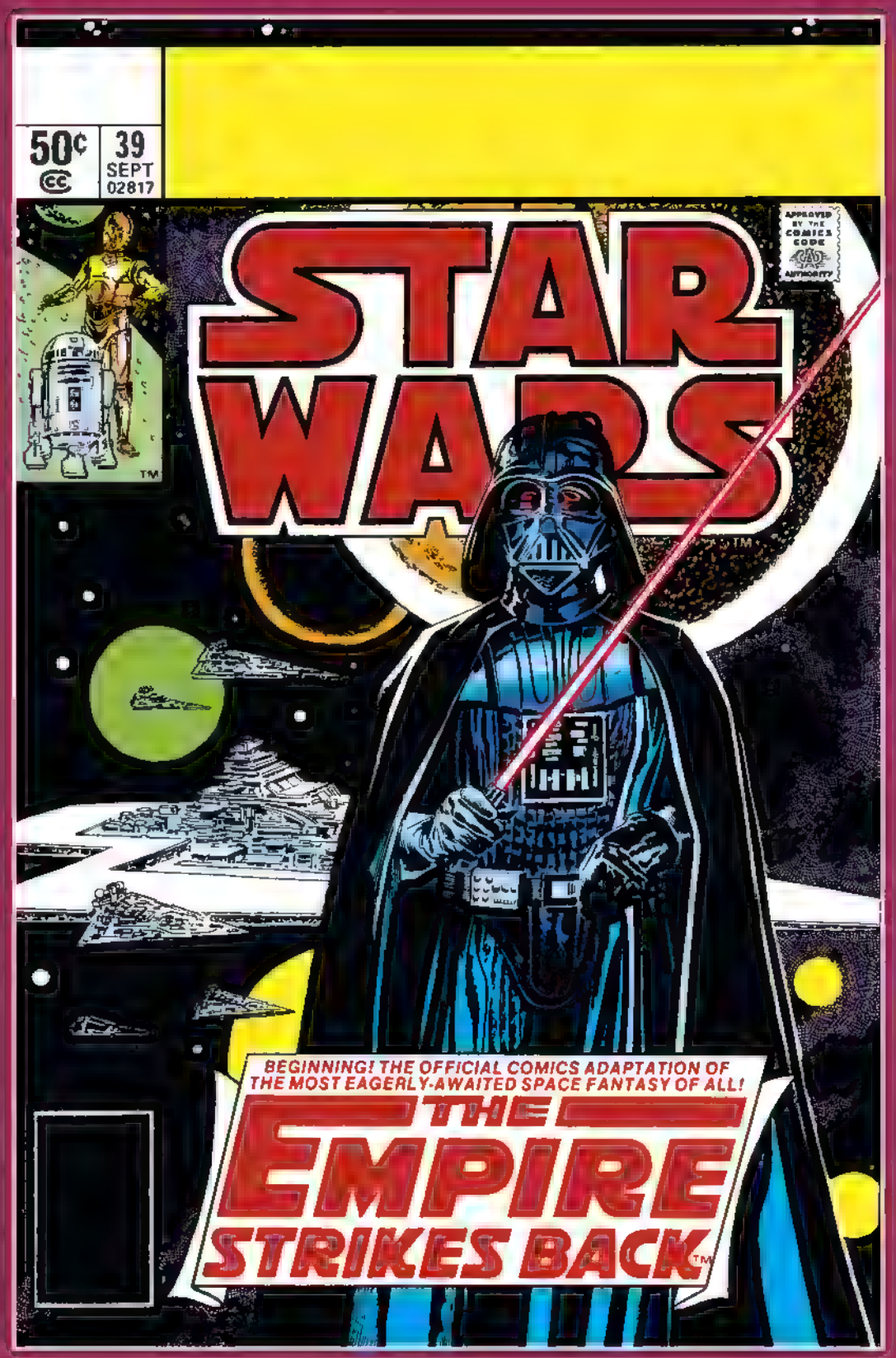
TOO LATE.
THE STAR DESTROYER CAPTAIN DEALS WITH THE UNKNOWN IN THE SAME WAY IN WHICH THE EMPIRE HANDLES MOST PROBLEMS...

...VIOLENTLY!

THERE! LET THEM LAUGH ABOUT THAT! AND WHILE THEY'RE REELING, OUR ATTACK SQUADRONS WILL RIP THEM TO PIECES!
SCANNERS INDICATE THAT THING IS SOME KIND OF BIO-MECHANICAL ORGANISM, SIR... CAPABLE OF SEALING OFF DAMAGE WITH FANTASTIC SWIFTNESS.
BUT WITH A SCATTERED, CONSTANT PATTERN OF HITS... WE CAN OVERTAX ITS RECOVERY SYSTEM.
PAIN, COMPUTER... I FEEL PAIN. NO FUN IN THAT. YOU'RE MAKING IT TOO REAL... TOO REAL!
IT IS REAL... YOU'VE DROPPED INTO THE MIDDLE OF A WAR! OUR WAR!
LISTEN TO US...! THIS IS AN ENEMY DEADLY AS THE ONES WHO RELEASED THE PLAGUE IN YOUR GALAXY!
THEY WON'T STOP UNTIL WE'RE ALL DEAD!
I HEAR YOU... IT'S JUST... STRANGE. AFTER SO MANY EONS... SO MANY GAMES...
HARD TO BELIEVE WE STILL AREN'T PLAYING...
BUT WHAT SHOOTS FORTH FROM A NEWLY OPENED FISSURE...

...ARE DEFINITELY NOT TOYS!
W-WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS...?!
ANTI-MATTER PODS--
"WHEN THEY MAKE CONTACT WITH MATTER--
"--THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE RESULT--"
--INSTANT DISINTEGRATION.
OVER. ALL OVER NOW, YOU... YOU CAN SAFELY RESUME YOUR JOURNEY AS WE...I... RESUME MINE.


YOUR SHIP HAS BEEN REPAIRED... YOU SHOULD HAVE NO FURTHER TROUBLE.
BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU...?
THIS IS A BIG GALAXY, WHY NOT STAY HERE?
YOUR GALAXY IS TOO REAL, MY FRIENDS. IT REMINDS ME OF ANOTHER--
--WHICH I TRAVELED LIGHT YEARS TO ESCAPE. I WISH YOU WELL... BUT I SEE NOW I BELONG TO THE VOID.
RIDING... ME, THE SHIP, THE COMPUTER, OUR GAMES.
MAY YOU IN TIME WIN HAPPINESS HERE! MINE... OURS... IS OUT THERE.
AND LAUGHTER RISES FROM THE COMMUNICATOR. PERHAPS MAD. PERHAPS NOT.
IT IS DIFFICULT TO TELL...
...FOR VERY SHORTLY, IT IS GONE.
NEXT THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK!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STAR WARS
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
BEGINNING! THE OFFICIAL COMICS ADAPTATION OF THE MOST EAGERLY-AWAITED SPACE FANTASY OF ALL!
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

Long ago in a galaxy far, far away. . .there exists a state of cosmic *civil war*. A brave alliance of *underground freedom fighters* has challenged the tyranny and oppression of the awesome *Galactic Empire*. This is their story!

LucasFilm PRESENTS: STAR WARS™ THE GREATEST SPACE FANTASY OF ALL!

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STAR WARS™ THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

BEGINNING! THE OFFICIAL COMICS ADAPTATION BASED ON THE SCRIPT BY ***LEIGH BRACKETT*** AND ***LAWRENCE KASDAN*** FROM THE STORY BY ***GEORGE LUCAS!***

A TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX RELEASE

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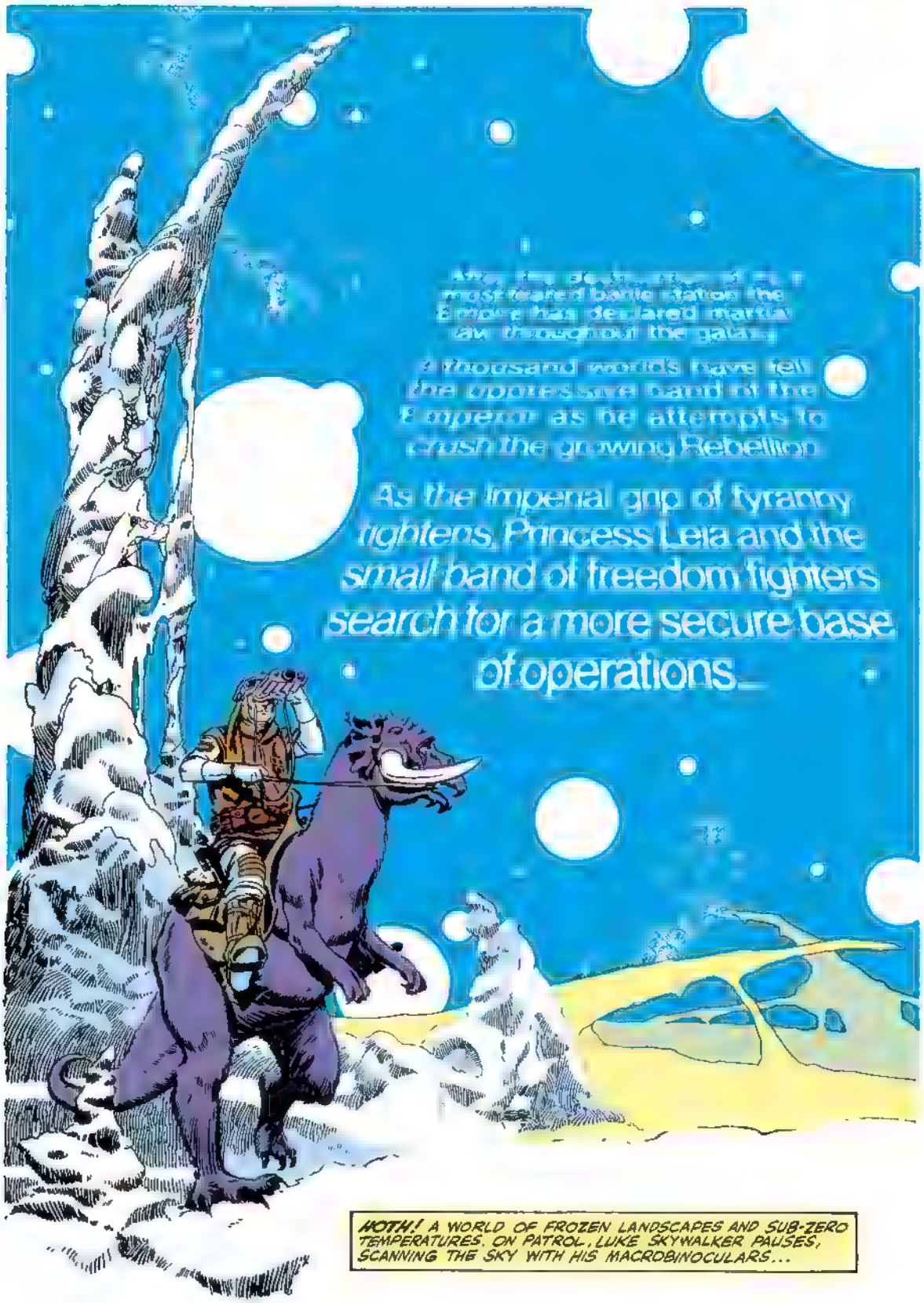
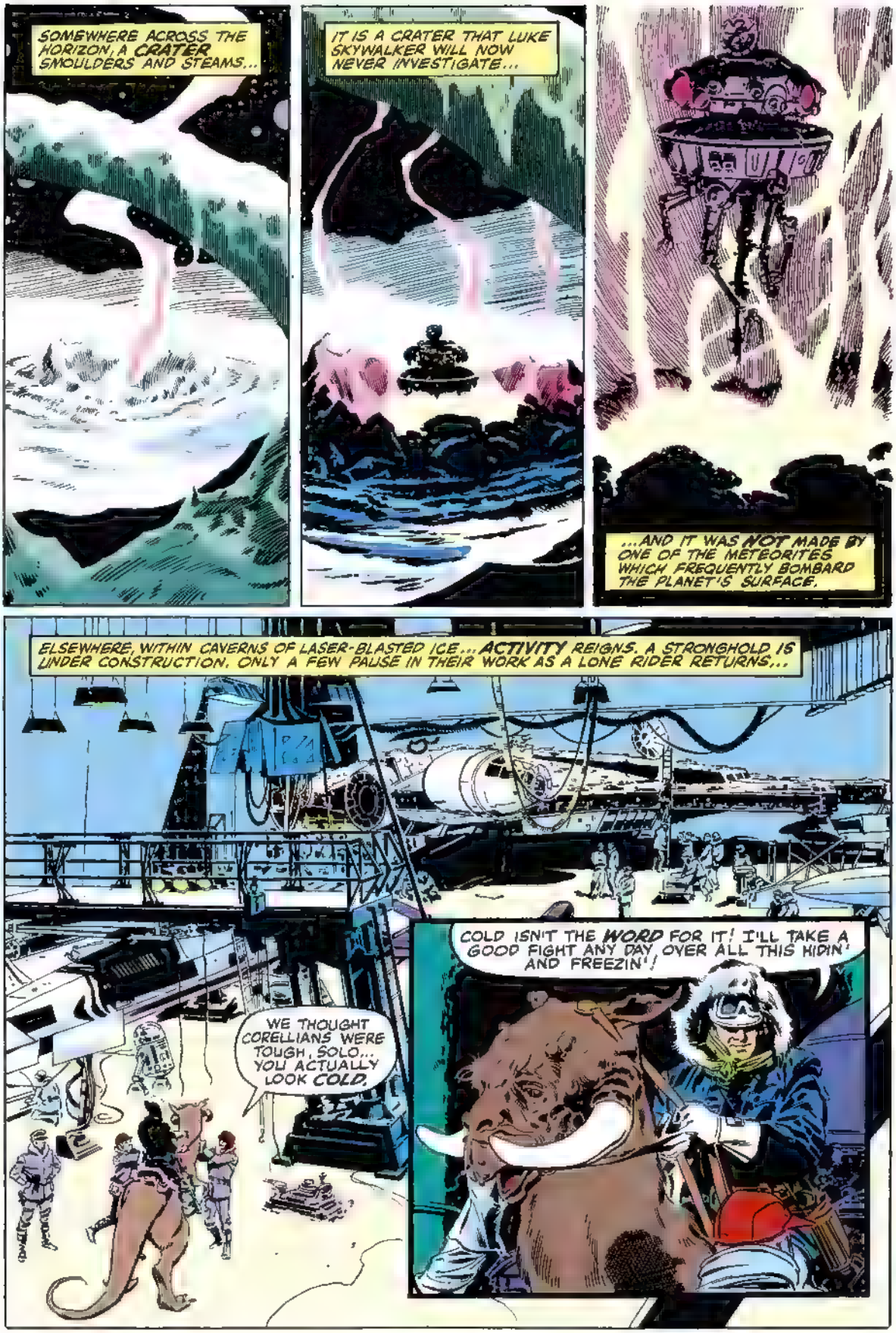

A thousand worlds have felt the oppressive hand of the Empire as he attempts to crush the growing Rebellion
As the Imperial grip of tyranny tightens, Princess Leia and the small band of freedom fighters search for a more secure base of operations...
HOTH! A WORLD OF FROZEN LANDSCAPES AND SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES. ON PATROL, LUKE SKYWALKER PAUSES, SCANNING THE SKY WITH HIS MACROBINOCULARS...

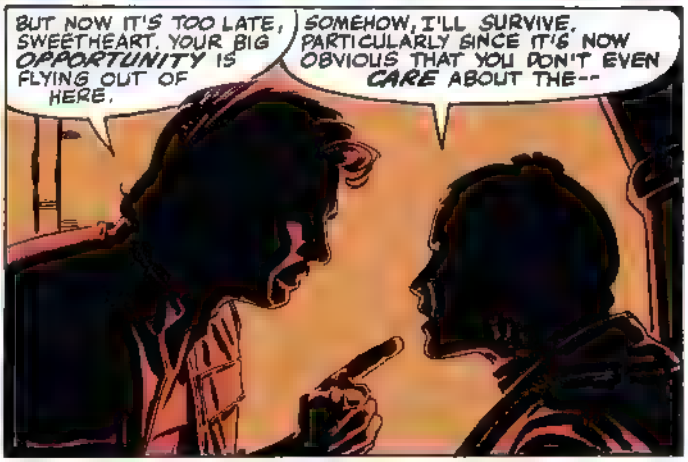
EASY, GIRL! IT'S JUST ANOTHER METEORITE!
THEY FALL ON THIS PLACE ABOUT AS REGULARLY AS THE SNOW.
CALMING HIS NERVOUS TAUNTAUN, THE YOUNG REBEL ACTIVATES HIS COMLINK TRANSMITTER...
YOU READ ME, KAN...? I'M ABOUT TO PACK IT IN... AFTER I CHECK OUT A METEORITE THAT JUST HIT. HAVEN'T PICKED UP ANY LIFE READINGS.
KID, THERE ISN'T ENOUGH LIFE ON THIS ICE CUBE TO FILL THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S HOLD! MY SENTRY MARKERS ARE PLACED. I'LL SEE YOU AT THE BASE!
NO SOONER DOES LUKE SIGN OFF.. THAN HIS MOUNT SKITTERS WORSE THAN EVER.
WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU? THERE'S NOTHING OUT HERE EXCEPT YOU AND M--
SON OF A JUMPIN'...
AND BEFORE HE CAN DRAW HIS BLASTER, SOMETHING HUGE AND HEAVY SLAMS INTO HIS FACE...
.. AND A MONSTROUS HOWLING FILLS THE AIR!


SOMEWHERE ACROSS THE HORIZON, A CRATER SMOULDERS AND STEAMS...
IT IS A CRATER THAT LUKE SKYWALKER WILL NOW NEVER INVESTIGATE...
...AND IT WAS NOT MADE BY ONE OF THE METEORITES WHICH FREQUENTLY BOMBARD THE PLANET'S SURFACE.
ELSEWHERE, WITHIN CAVERNS OF LASER-BLASTED ICE... ACTIVITY REIGNS. A STRONGHOLD IS UNDER CONSTRUCTION. ONLY A FEW PAUSE IN THEIR WORK AS A LONE RIDER RETURNS...
WE THOUGHT CORELLIANS WERE TOUGH, SOLO... YOU ACTUALLY LOOK COLD.
COLD ISN'T THE WORD FOR IT! I'LL TAKE A GOOD FIGHT ANY DAY OVER ALL THIS HIDIN' AND FREEZIN'!

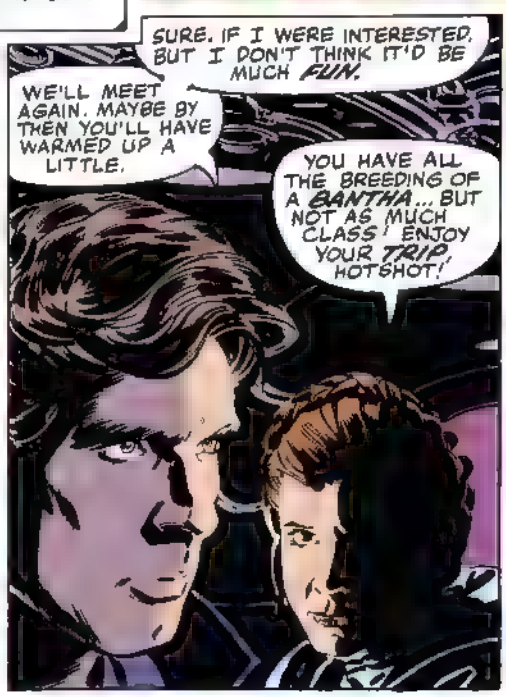
HAN STRIDES PAST SNOWSPEEDERS AND X-WING FIGHTERS TO THE REAR OF THE GREAT HANGAR... WHERE A BATTERED FREIGHTER STANDS.
HEY, CHEWIE! HOW'S IT COMING WITH THE FALCON'S LIFTERS? SOONER THEY'RE FIXED.. THE SOONER WE'RE OUT OF HERE.
RAARRGHHH!
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT! I'LL GO REPORT... THEN GIVE YOU A HAND!
FOOTSTEPS SOUND BEHIND THE SMUGGLER PILOT...
TALKING ABOUT LEAVING AGAIN...? YOU'RE A GOOD MAN IN A FIGHT, SOLO. GENERAL RIEEKAN AND THE REST OF US HATE TO LOSE YOU.
THANKS, MAJOR BUT THERE'S A PRICE ON MY HEAD. IF I DON'T PAY OFF JABBA THE HUT... I'M A WALKING DEAD MAN.
YES, WE HEARD ABOUT THAT BOUNTY HUNTER ON ORD MANTELL. A DEATH MARK IS NOT AN EASY THING TO LIVE WITH..
GOOD LUCK SOLO
I GUESS THIS IS IT, YOUR HIGHNESS.
I SUPPOSE IT IS.
WELL, DON'T GO ALL MUSHY ON ME.
SO LONG, PRINCESS.

HAN... WAIT! DOES... DOES LUKE KNOW?
HE WILL WHEN HE GETS BACK. AND DON'T GIVE ME ANY LOOKS. EVERY DAY, JABBA SENDS OUT MORE REMOTES, GANK KILLERS, AND WHO KNOWS WHAT ELSE.
I'VE GOT TO GET THIS PRICE OFF MY HEAD WHILE I STILL HAVE ONE.
BUT... YOU'RE A NATURAL LEADER. WE STILL NEED YOU.
NO, YOUR WORSHIP. THAT'S NOT WHY YOU CAME AFTER ME. I THINK YOU WERE AFRAID I WAS LEAVING YOU WITHOUT EVEN A KISS.

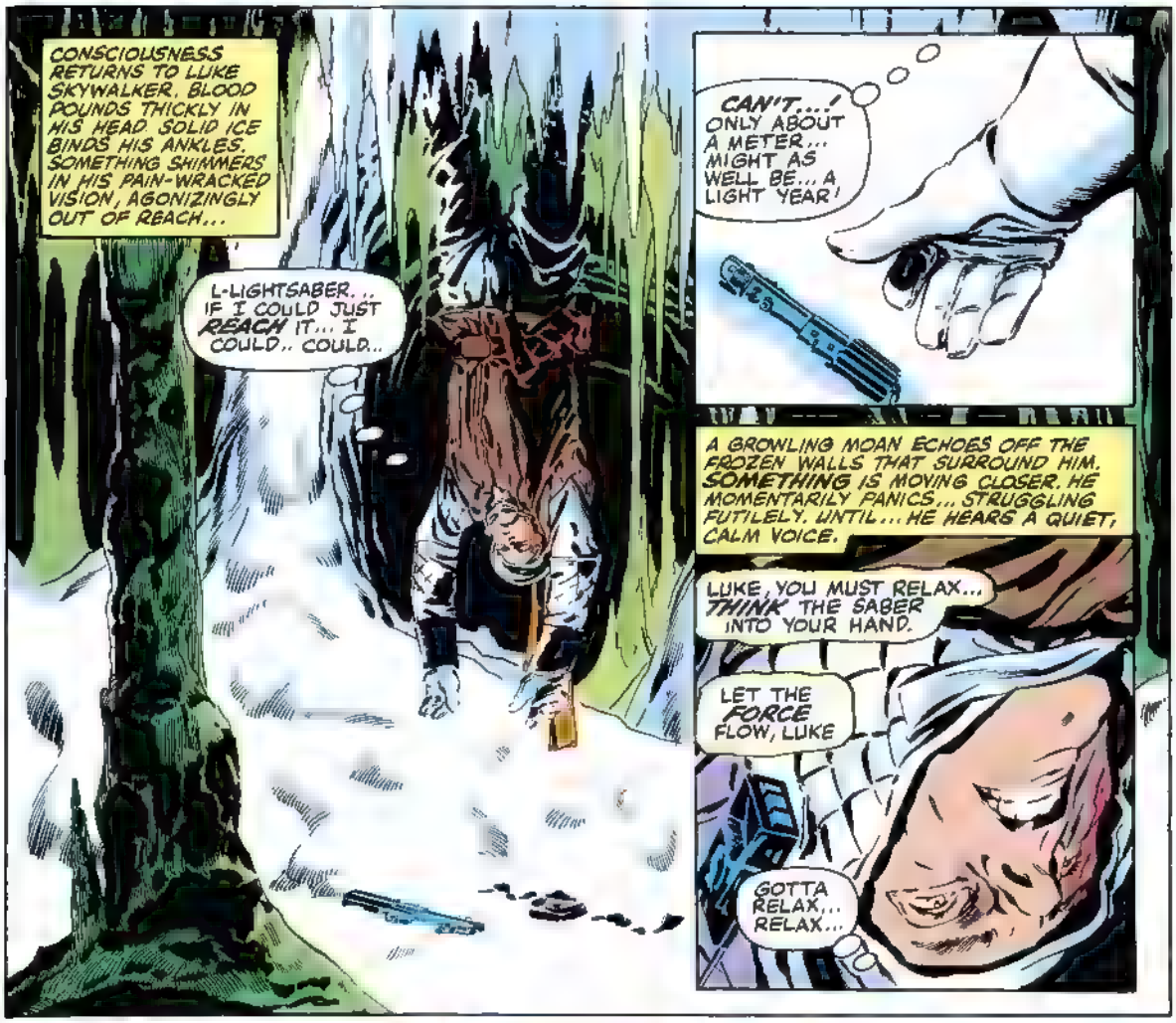
WHAT? I'D JUST AS SOON KISS A WOOKIEE!
THERE'S NO ACCOUNTING FOR TASTE. BELIEVE ME, YOU COULD USE A GOOD KISS YOU'VE BEEN SO BUSY GIVING ORDERS, YOU'VE FORGOTTEN HOW TO BE A WOMAN.

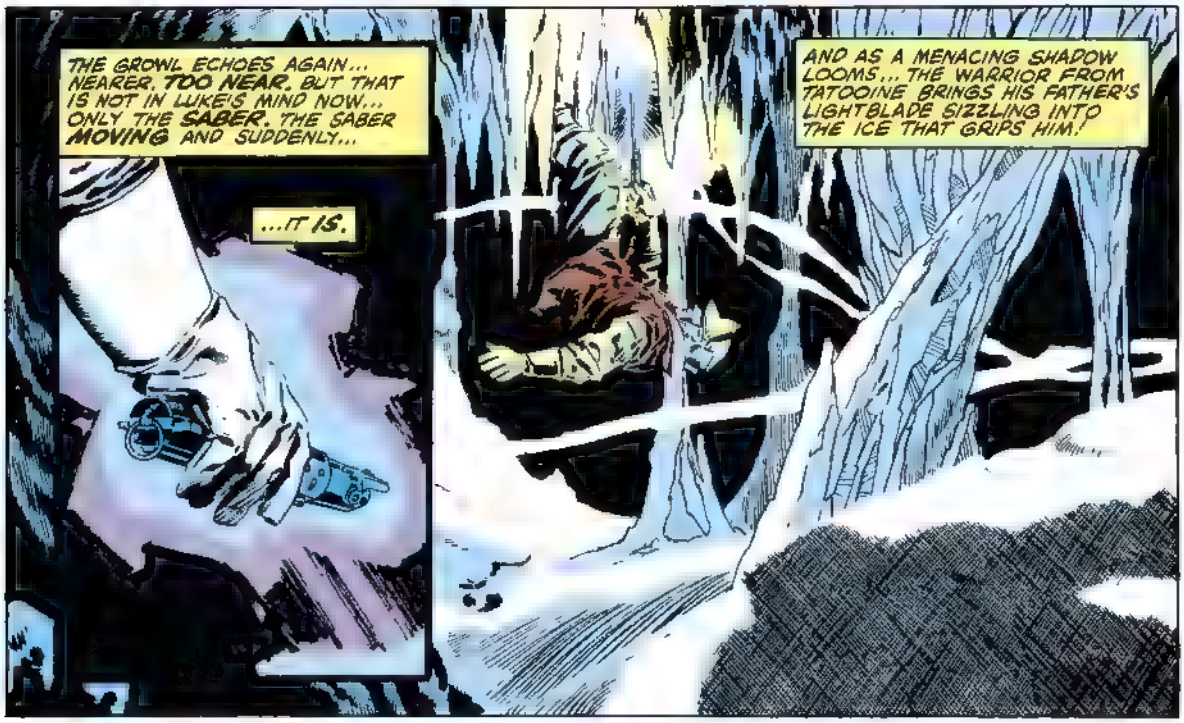

BUT NOW IT'S TOO LATE, SWEETHEART. YOUR BIG OPPORTUNITY IS FLYING OUT OF HERE.
SOMEHOW, I'LL SURVIVE, PARTICULARLY SINCE IT'S NOW OBVIOUS THAT YOU DON'T EVEN CARE ABOUT THE--

SPARE ME ANOTHER LECTURE ABOUT THE REBELLION. IT'S ALL YOU EVER THINK ABOUT. YOU'RE AS COLD AS THIS PLANET
AND YOU THINK YOU'RE THE ONE TO APPLY SOME HEAT?


SURE. IF I WERE INTERESTED, BUT I DON'T THINK IT'D BE MUCH FUN.
WE'LL MEET AGAIN. MAYBE BY THEN YOU'LL HAVE WARMED UP A LITTLE.
YOU HAVE ALL THE BREEDING OF A BANTHA... BUT NOT AS MUCH CLASS! ENJOY YOUR TRIP, HOTSHOT!

LEIA ORGANA STORMS AWAY IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, NEVER HEARING THE CRUMBLING OF AN ICY WALL BEHIND HER...
...OR GLIMPSING WHAT CAUSES IT.


CONSCIOUSNESS RETURNS TO LUKE SKYWALKER. BLOOD POUNDS THICKLY IN HIS HEAD. SOLID ICE BINDS HIS ANKLES. SOMETHING SHIMMERS IN HIS PAIN-WRACKED VISION, AGONIZINGLY OUT OF REACH...
L-LIGHTSABER... IF I COULD JUST REACH IT... I COULD.. COULD..
CAN'T...! ONLY ABOUT A METER... MIGHT AS WELL BE... A LIGHT YEAR!
A GROWLING MOAN ECHOES OFF THE FROZEN WALLS THAT SURROUND HIM. SOMETHING IS MOVING CLOSER. HE MOMENTARILY PANICS... STRUGGLING FUTILELY. UNTIL... HE HEARS A QUIET, CALM VOICE.
LUKE, YOU MUST RELAX... THINK THE SABER INTO YOUR HAND.
LET THE FORCE FLOW, LUKE
GOTTA RELAX... RELAX...

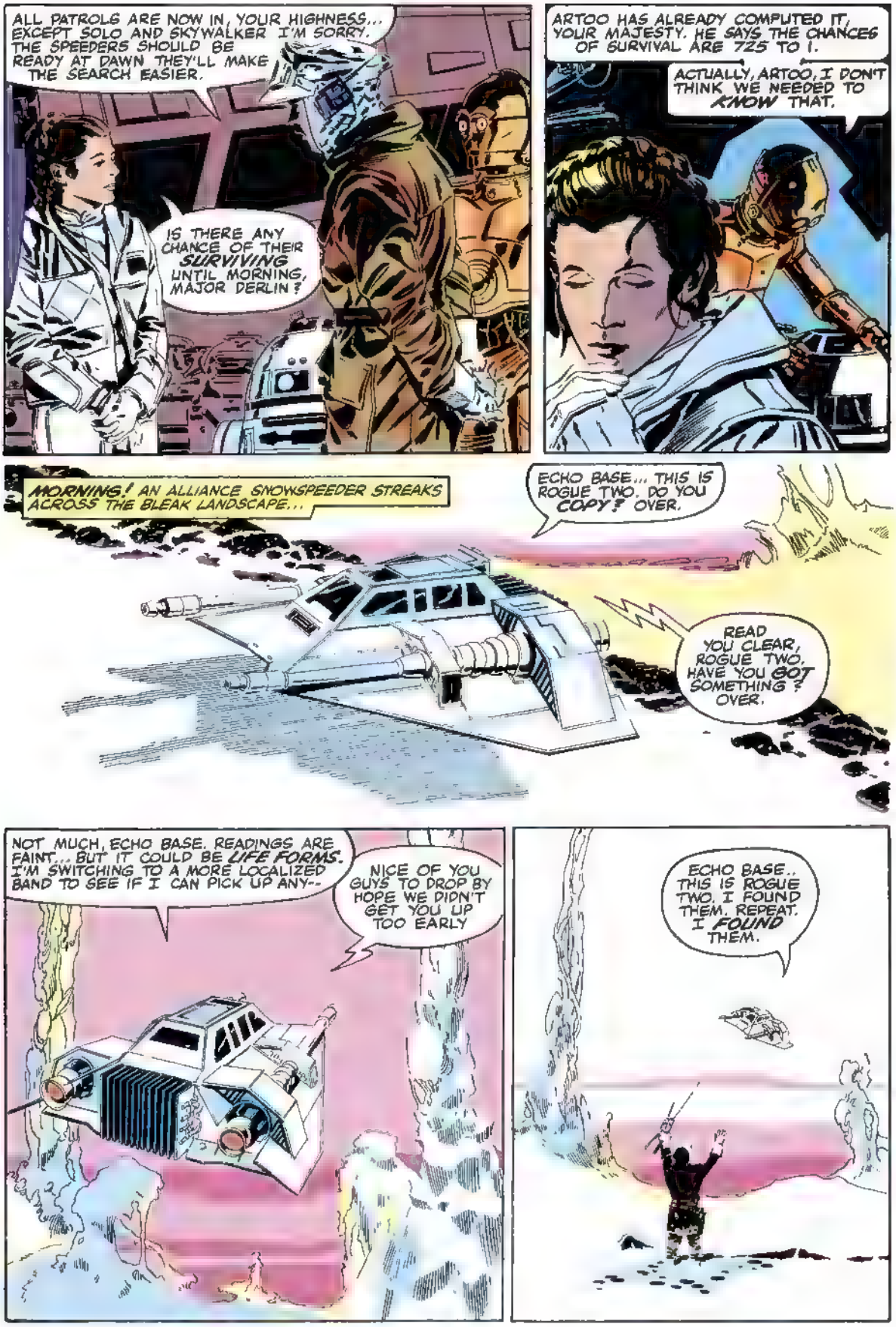

THE GROWL ECHOES AGAIN... NEARER, TOO NEAR. BUT THAT IS NOT IN LUKE'S MIND NOW... ONLY THE SABER. THE SABER MOVING AND SUDDENLY...
...IT IS.
AND AS A MENACING SHADOW LOOMS... THE WARRIOR FROM TATOOINE BRINGS HIS FATHER'S LIGHTBLADE SIZZLING INTO THE ICE THAT GRIPS HIM!

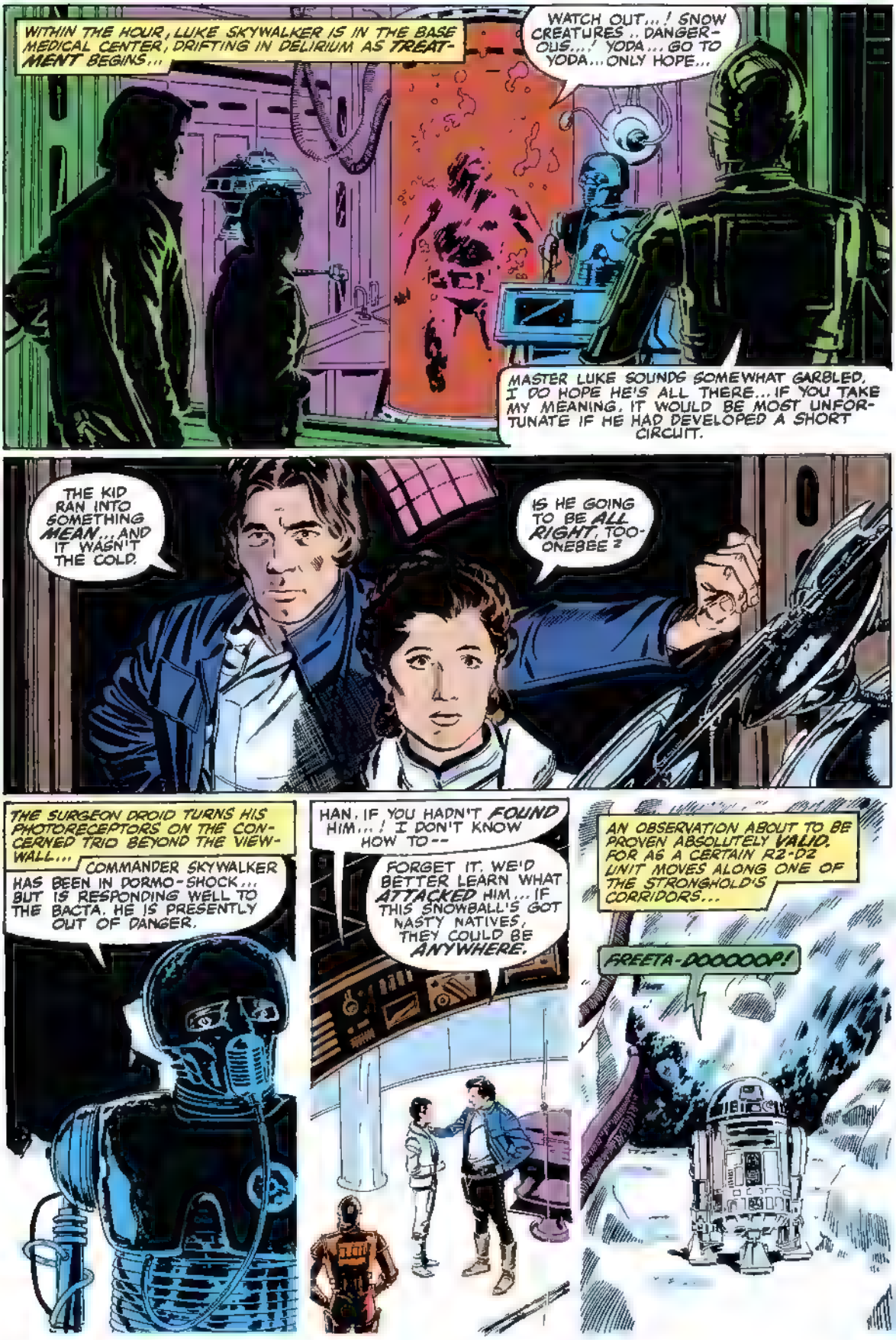
LUKE FALLS, CRASHING HEAVILY INTO THE SNOW... AS SOMETHING HUGE RUSHES TOWARD HIM!
HE ROLLS, SLASHING OUT WITH HIS LIGHTBLADE...
...AND A SCREAM OF PAIN FILLS THE ICY GORGE.
IT STILL ECHOES IN HIS MIND AS HE SOMEHOW STAGGERS TO SAFETY...
...LIMPING INTO THE GATHERING GRAYNESS THAT HERALDS THE APPROACH OF SUB-ZERO NIGHT ON HOTH.
MEANWHILE, IN THE REBEL STRONGHOLD'S HANGAR... AN ARGUMENT IS IN PROGRESS.
VEETA! DIT DIT!
IT IS NOT MY FAULT, YOU MALFUNCTIONING TWERP. I DID NOT ASK YOU TO TURN ON THE THERMAL HEATER!
I MERELY COMMENTED THAT IT WAS FREEZING IN HER CHAMBER. BUT IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE FREEZING. ARE WE GOING TO GET ALL HER THINGS DRIED OUT BEFORE--

AH, HERE WE ARE.
CAPTAIN SOLO, SIR? THE PRINCESS HAS BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU ON THE COMMUNICATOR. IT MUST BE MALFUNCTIONING.
I SHUT IT OFF. WHAT'S TROUBLING HER ROYAL HOLINESS NOW?
SHE HOPED MASTER LUKE MIGHT BE WITH YOU. IT'S ALMOST NIGHT OUTSIDE AND IF HE'S NOT BACK YET...
HAN KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT THAT MEANS, AND AN URGENT CHECK WITH THE WATCH OFFICER...
...CONFIRMS THE WORST.
UNLESS WE FIND HIM FAST... LUKE IS DEAD. ARE THE SPEEDERS READY?
MAYBE BY MORNING... ADAPTING THEM TO THE COLD IS PROVING DIFFICULT. AND WE'VE HAD OTHER PROBLEMS.. SOMETHING ATTACKED ONE OF THE TAUNTAUNS.
RIGHT NOW I'M ONLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE KID. WE'LL HAVE TO SEND RIDERS OUT. I'LL TAKE SECTOR FOUR.
SOLO, THE TEMPERATURE IS FALLING TOO RAPIDLY. THE NIGHT STORMS WILL START BEFORE ANY OF YOU REACH THE FIRST MARKER.
THEN I'LL SEE YOU IN HELL.

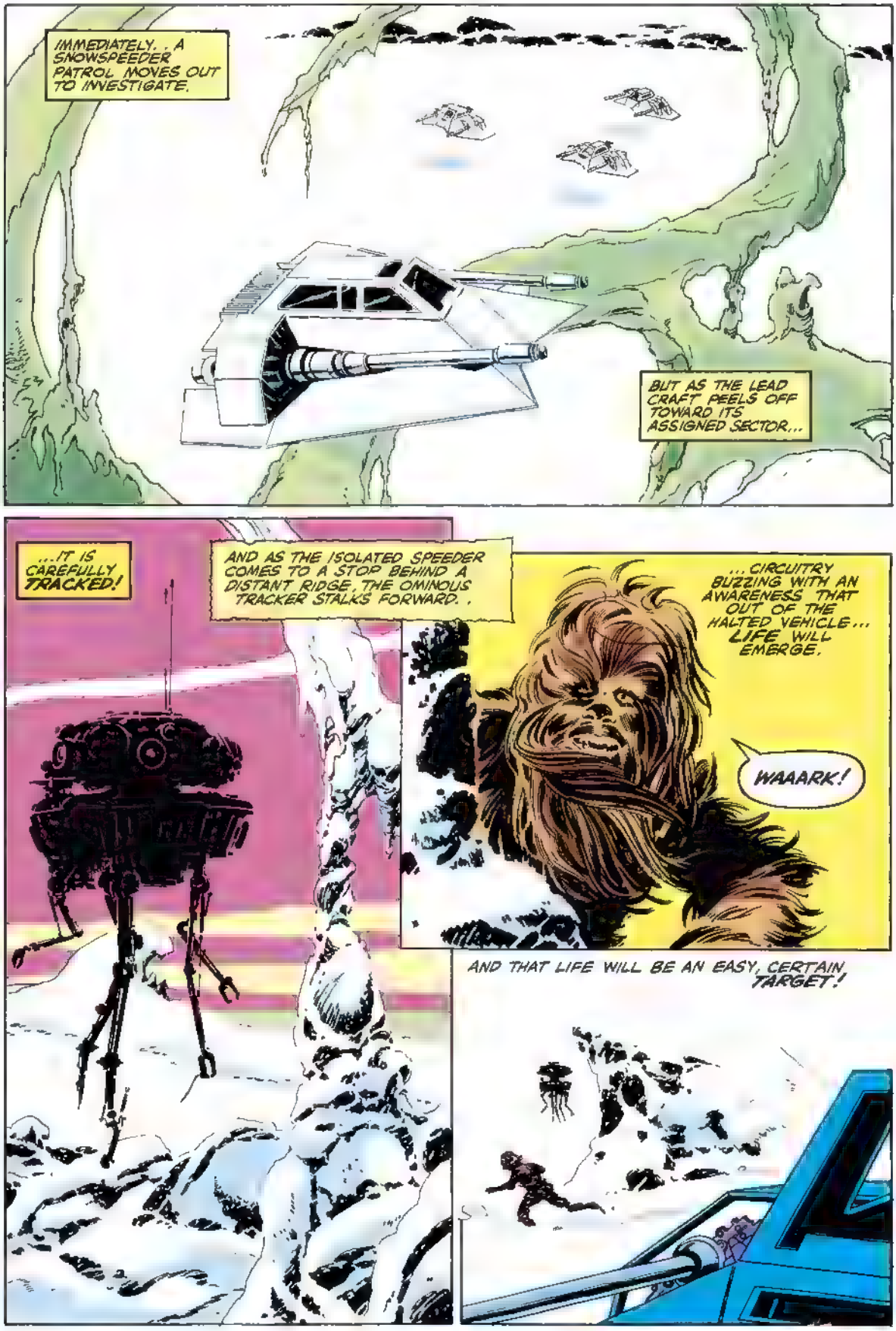
IN THE FADING TWILIGHT ON HOTH'S FROZEN PLAINS... A FIGURE STAGGERS, TRYING TO STAY UPRIGHT AGAINST BLASTS OF CUTTING WIND AND SNOW, TRYING TO KEEP MOVING ON LEGS LONG NUMBED...
TRYING... AND FAILING.
C-CAN'T KEEP GOING. CAN'T...
YOU MUST, YOUNG LUKE! THIS WAY. LOOK AT ME. YOU MUST SURVIVE.
B-BEN...? I'M SO COLD, BEN... SO COLD.
YOU MUST GO TO THE DAGOBAH SYSTEM. YOU WILL LEARN FROM YODA THE JEDI MASTER. THE ONE WHO TAUGHT ME.
YOU MUST, LUKE. YOU'RE OUR ONLY HOPE.
B-BENNNNNNNN...!
THE VISION IS GONE, AND WITH IT, THE LAST OF LUKE SKYWALKER'S RESISTANCE...

... EVEN AS A RIDER ON A WEARY, EXHAUSTION-SPENT TAUNTAUN APPEARS ON THE HORIZON.
KID...?!
LEAPING FROM HIS MOUNT, HAN RUSHES TO THE UNMOVING FIGURE IN THE SNOW.
COME ON, BUDDY. GIVE ME A SIGN YOU'RE ALIVE. YOU WOULDN'T LEAVE ME OUT HERE ALL ALONE, WOULD YOU?
THE FAINTEST OF GROANS BRINGS A SMILE TO THE CORELLIAN'S FACE...
A SMILE THAT SWIFTLY FADES AS HE TURNS TO FIND...
COLD'S FINISHED MY TAUNTAUN! LET'S GO KID... WE HAVEN'T GOT MUCH TIME.
BLASTED COMLINK IS USELESS IN THIS STORM!
IF I DON'T GET SOME SHELTER UP FAST.. JABBA THE HUT WON'T NEED THOSE BOUNTY HUNTERS!
AND AS HAN STRUGGLES TO PULL EQUIPMENT FROM THE DEAD ANIMAL'S PACK, NIGHT IN ALL ITS FIERCENESS COMES TO HOTH...
... A FACT CHILLING AS THE STORM WINDS TO THOSE KEEPING VIGIL AT THE REBEL STRONGHOLD.
ARTOO, YOU MUST COME INSIDE.. YOUR RANGE IS PROBABLY TOO LIMITED TO PICK UP ANY SIGNALS. THERE'S NOTHING MORE YOU CAN DO.
ARTOO, THEY MUST CLOSE THE SHIELD DOORS. WILL YOU HURRY... ² MY JOINTS ARE FREEZING UP!


ALL PATROLS ARE NOW IN, YOUR HIGHNESS... EXCEPT SOLO AND SKYWALKER I'M SORRY. THE SPEEDERS SHOULD BE READY AT DAWN. THEY'LL MAKE THE SEARCH EASIER.
IS THERE ANY CHANCE OF THEIR SURVIVING UNTIL MORNING, MAJOR DERLIN?
ARTOO HAS ALREADY COMPUTED IT, YOUR MAJESTY. HE SAYS THE CHANCES OF SURVIVAL ARE 725 TO 1.
ACTUALLY, ARTOO, I DON'T THINK WE NEEDED TO KNOW THAT.
MORNING! AN ALLIANCE SNOWSPEEDER STREAKS ACROSS THE BLEAK LANDSCAPE...
ECHO BASE... THIS IS ROGUE TWO. DO YOU COPY? OVER.
READ YOU CLEAR, ROGUE TWO. HAVE YOU GOT SOMETHING? OVER.
NOT MUCH, ECHO BASE. READINGS ARE FAINT... BUT IT COULD BE LIFE FORMS. I'M SWITCHING TO A MORE LOCALIZED BAND TO SEE IF I CAN PICK UP ANY--
NICE OF YOU GUYS TO DROP BY. HOPE WE DIDN'T GET YOU UP TOO EARLY
ECHO BASE.. THIS IS ROGUE TWO. I FOUND THEM. REPEAT. I FOUND THEM.

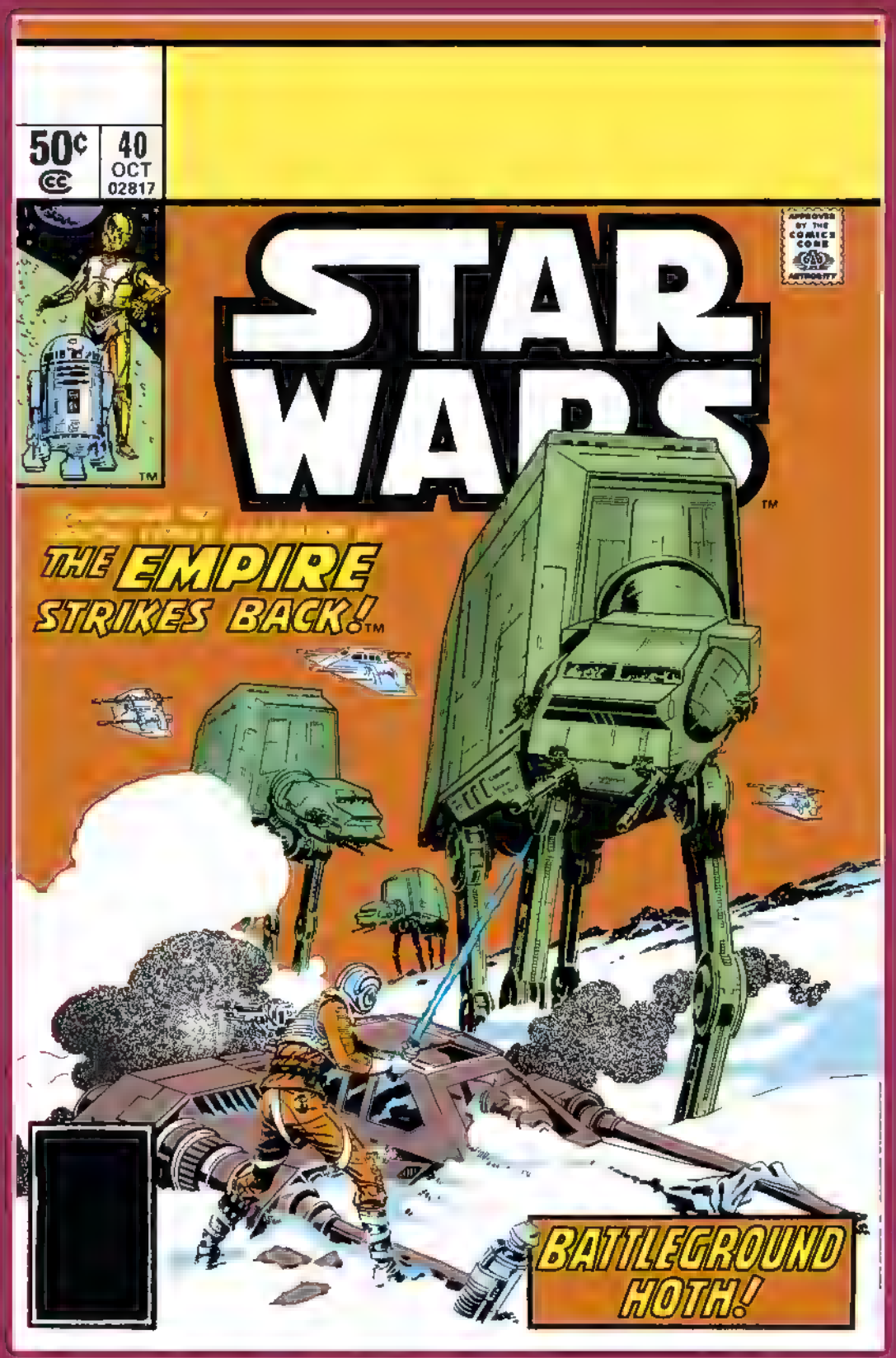

WITHIN THE HOUR, LUKE SKYWALKER IS IN THE BASE MEDICAL CENTER, DRIFTING IN DELIRIUM AS TREATMENT BEGINS...
WATCH OUT...! SNOW CREATURES.. DANGEROUS...! YODA... GO TO YODA... ONLY HOPE...
MASTER LUKE SOUNDS SOMEWHAT GARBLED. I DO HOPE HE'S ALL THERE... IF YOU TAKE MY MEANING, IT WOULD BE MOST UNFORTUNATE IF HE HAD DEVELOPED A SHORT CIRCUIT.
THE KID RAN INTO SOMETHING MEAN... AND IT WASN'T THE COLD.
IS HE GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, TOO-ONEBEE 2
THE SURGEON DROID TURNS HIS PHOTORECEPTORS ON THE CONCERNED TRIO BEYOND THE VIEW-WALL...
COMMANDER SKYWALKER HAS BEEN IN DORMO-SHOCK... BUT IS RESPONDING WELL TO THE BACTA. HE IS PRESENTLY OUT OF DANGER.
HAN, IF YOU HADN'T FOUND HIM...! I DON'T KNOW HOW TO--
FORGET IT. WE'D BETTER LEARN WHAT ATTACKED HIM... IF THIS SNOWBALL'S GOT NASTY NATIVES, THEY COULD BE ANYWHERE.
AN OBSERVATION ABOUT TO BE PROVEN ABSOLUTELY VALID, FOR AS A CERTAIN R2-D2 UNIT MOVES ALONG ONE OF THE STRONGHOLD'S CORRIDORS...
FREETA-DOOOOOP!

ARTOO'S ELECTRONIC SHRIEK BRINGS REBEL GUARDS RUNNING. SWIFTLY, SUDDENLY.. WHAT WAS ONCE A CORRIDOR BECOMES A BATTLEGROUND!
SECURITY CONTROL... THIS IS SECTION J! ALERT ALL INTERIOR PATROLS. ALERT ALL PATROLS!
SHORTLY, AT THE BASE COMMAND CENTER...
...STUN BLASTS FINALLY STOPPED IT, YOUR HIGHNESS EVOLVING IN HOTH'S EXTREME COLD HAS GIVEN IT SUB-NORMAL LIFE FUNCTIONS... WE'VE HAD TO ADJUST OUR SENSORS TO DETECT THEM.
ALL UNEXPLORED CAVE AREAS SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY SCANNED, GENERAL RIEEKAN... THOUGH I'M NOT SURE I'M GOING TO BE HAPPY KNOWING HOW MANY THERE ARE!
OF COURSE, ARTOO WOULD BE IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS!
PRINCESS! GENERAL! LOOK AT THIS SCOPE... WE'VE GOT A VISITOR!
IT'S IN ZONE TWELVE, MOVING EAST... TOWARD ADVANCE STATION THREE-EIGHT.
AND IT'S METAL... DEFINITELY NOT ONE OF THOSE CREATURES. STATION THREE-EIGHT... THIS IS ECHO COMMAND COME IN, STATION THREE-EIGHT!
THIS IS THREE-EIGHT, ECHO COMMAND! WE HAVE VISUAL CONTACT! IT LOOKS LIKE--
N-NO...!
AND THERE IS ONLY SILENCE FROM ADVANCE STATION THREE-EIGHT.


IMMEDIATELY. . A SNOWSPEEDER PATROL MOVES OUT TO INVESTIGATE.
BUT AS THE LEAD CRAFT PEELS OFF TOWARD ITS ASSIGNED SECTOR...
...IT IS CAREFULLY TRACKED!
AND AS THE ISOLATED SPEEDER COMES TO A STOP BEHIND A DISTANT RIDGE, THE OMINOUS TRACKER STALKS FORWARD. .
...CIRCUITRY BUZZING WITH AN AWARENESS THAT OUT OF THE HALTED VEHICLE... LIFE WILL EMERGE.
WAAARK!
AND THAT LIFE WILL BE AN EASY, CERTAIN TARGET!

THEN, JUST A FRACTION OF AN INSTANT TOO LATE, ITS SENSORS REGISTERS THAT THE TARGET...
BA-WOM!
...IS ALSO A DECOY!
.. I DIDN'T HIT IT THAT HARD. MUST'VE HAD SOME KIND'A SELF-DESTRUCT. DOESN'T LEAVE MUCH TO IDENTIFY.
AN IMPERIAL ARDBE DROID!
HEY, C'MON. LET'S NOT PANIC. WE DON'T KNOW THAT.
BUT WE DON'T KNOW THAT IT WASN'T.
SOMEWHERE IN DEEP SPACE, THE FLEET HOVERS, WAITING WAITING FOR A HINT, A CLUE. UNTIL, ABOARD THE HULKING, OMINOUS CRUISER THAT LOOMS LARGER THAN EVEN THE SURROUNDING STAR DESTROYERS...
I THINK WE'VE FOUND SOMETHING, ADMIRAL OZZEL...

THE REPORT WE HAVE IS ONLY A FRAGMENT... FROM A PROBE DROID IN THE HOTH SYSTEM, SIR BUT IT'S THE BEST LEAD WE'VE HAD IN--
WE'VE THOUSANDS OF PROBE DROIDS SEARCHING THE GALAXY, CAPTAIN PIETT... I WANT PROOF, NOT LEADS! I DON'T INTEND TO CONTINUE CHASING ENDLESSLY AROUND THE COSMOS.
THE HOTH SYSTEM. THAT'S IT.
B-BUT, MY LORD... / THERE ARE SO MANY UNCHARTED SETTLEMENTS. IT COULD MERELY BE SMUGGLERS OR--
THAT IS THE ONE. AND SKYWALKER IS THERE! BRING IN THE PATROL SHIPS, ADMIRAL, AND TELL GENERAL VEERS TO ALERT HIS TROOPS...
...WE'RE PROCEEDING TO THE HOTH SYSTEM. FULL SPEED!
NEXT ISSUE: BATTLEGROUND HOTH!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STAR WARS
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BATTLEGROUND HOTH!

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STAR WARS™ THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF THEIR DEATH STAR, THE EMPEROR'S FORCES TIGHTEN THE REINS OF TYRANNY THROUGHOUT THE GALAXY. MEANWHILE ON THE FROZEN PLANET OF **HOTH**, PRINCESS LEIA AND HER FREEDOM FIGHTERS STRUGGLE TO KEEP THE REBELLION GROWING, AS LUKE FALLS VICTIM TO ONE OF THE WORLD'S **ICE MONSTERS** AND THEIR NEWLY ESTABLISHED BASE IS MENACED BY AN IMPERIAL **PROBE DROID**...

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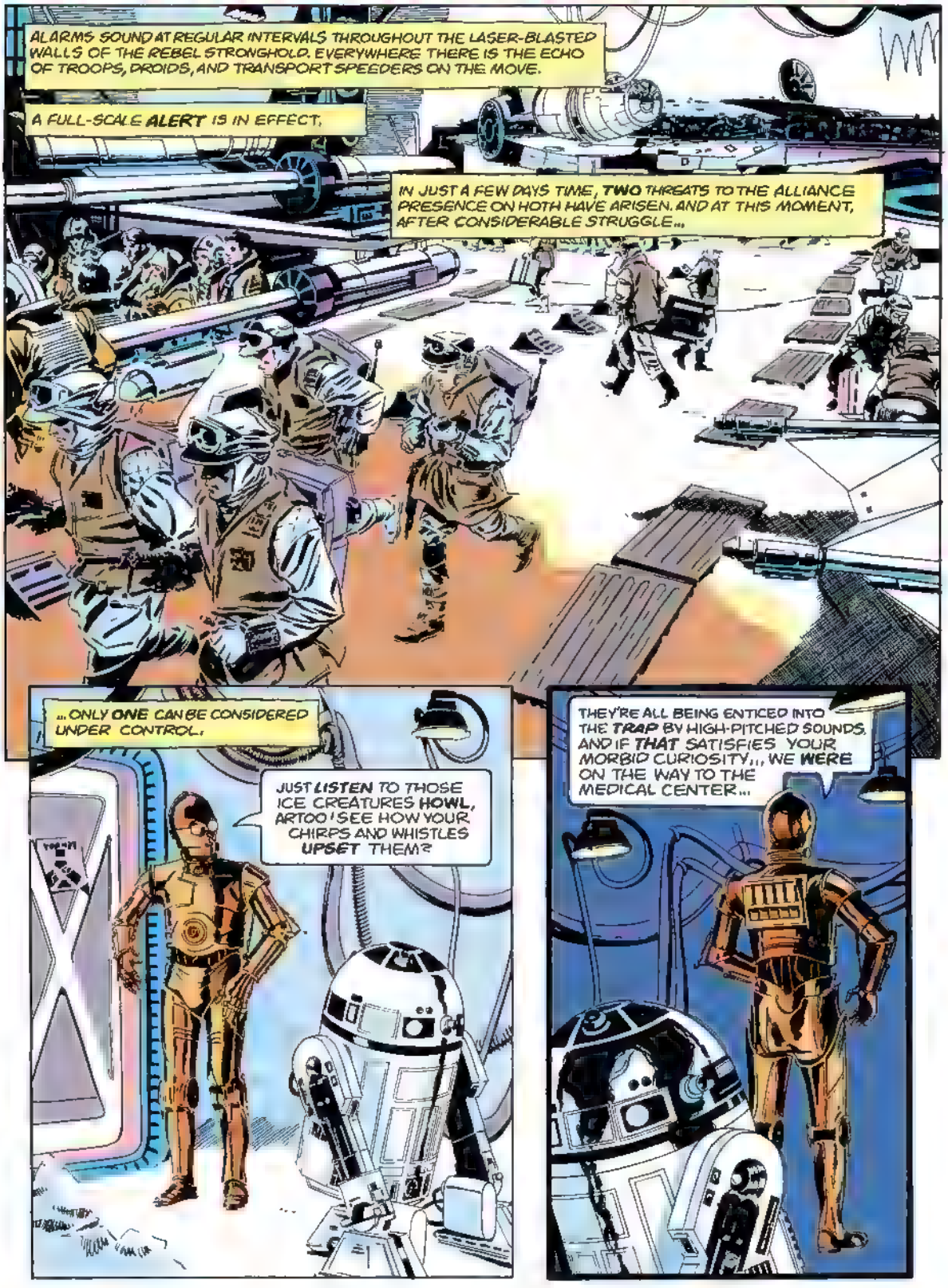
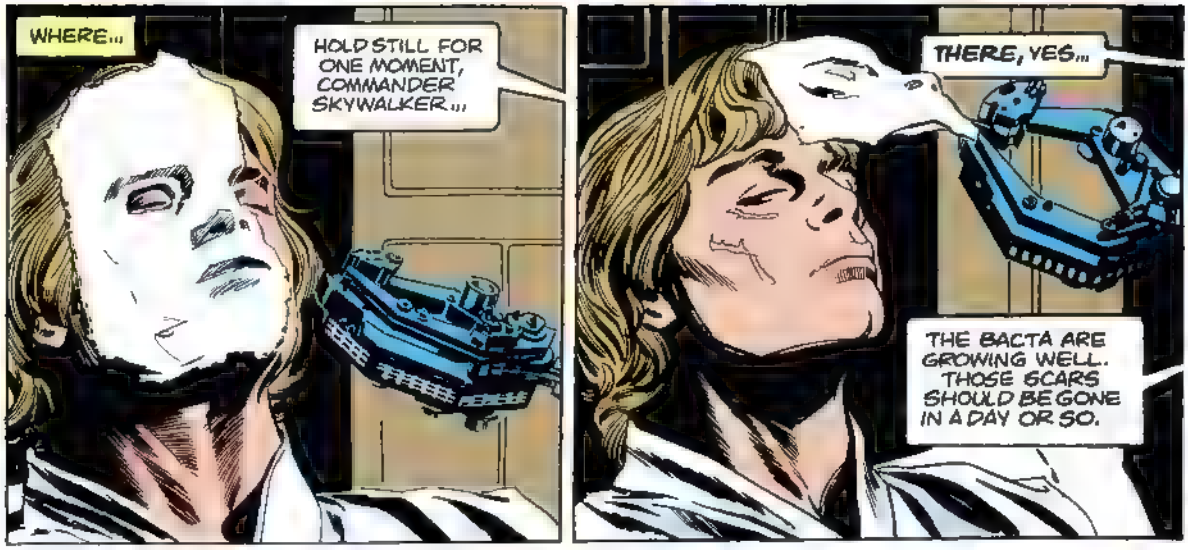
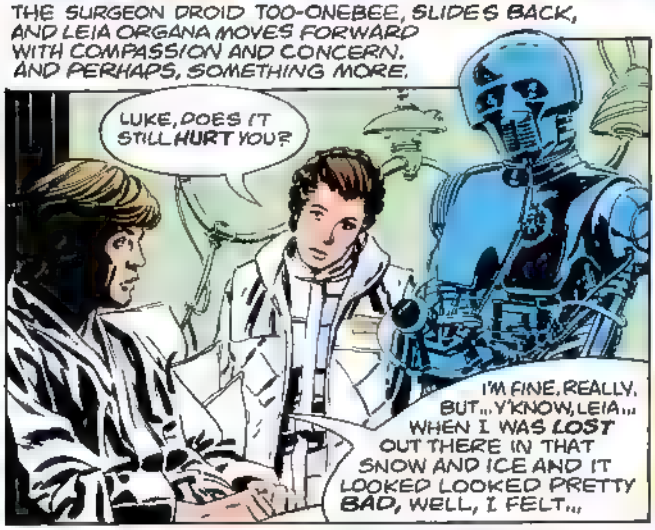
CHAPTER TWO:

BATTLEGROUND HOTH!


ALARMS SOUND AT REGULAR INTERVALS THROUGHOUT THE LASER-BLASTED WALLS OF THE REBEL STRONGHOLD. EVERYWHERE THERE IS THE ECHO OF TROOPS, DROIDS, AND TRANSPORT SPEEDERS ON THE MOVE.
A FULL-SCALE ALERT IS IN EFFECT.
IN JUST A FEW DAYS TIME, TWO THREATS TO THE ALLIANCE PRESENCE ON HOTH HAVE ARISEN. AND AT THIS MOMENT, AFTER CONSIDERABLE STRUGGLE...
...ONLY ONE CAN BE CONSIDERED UNDER CONTROL.
JUST LISTEN TO THOSE ICE CREATURES HOWL, ARTOO! SEE HOW YOUR CHIRPS AND WHISTLES UPSET THEM?
THEY'RE ALL BEING ENTICED INTO THE TRAP BY HIGH-PITCHED SOUNDS, AND IF THAT SATISFIES YOUR MORBID CURIOSITY... WE WERE ON THE WAY TO THE MEDICAL CENTER...


WHERE...
HOLD STILL FOR ONE MOMENT, COMMANDER SKYWALKER...
THERE, YES...
THE BACTA ARE GROWING WELL. THOSE SCARS SHOULD BE GONE IN A DAY OR SO.

THE SURGEON DROID TOO-ONEBEE, SLIDES BACK, AND LEIA ORGANA MOVES FORWARD WITH COMPASSION AND CONCERN. AND PERHAPS, SOMETHING MORE.

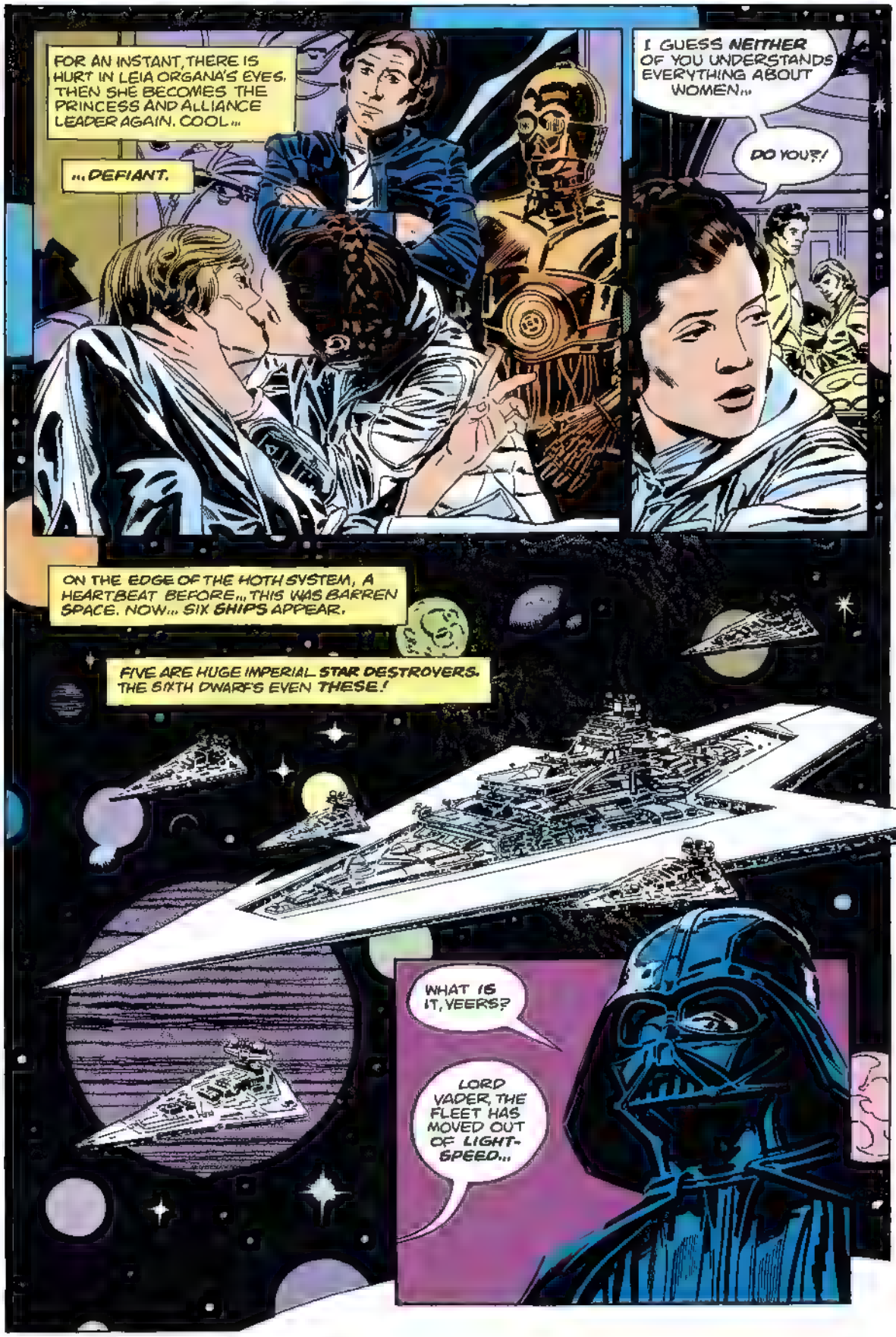

LUKE, DOES IT STILL HURT YOU?
I'M FINE, REALLY. BUT... Y'KNOW, LEIA... WHEN I WAS LOST OUT THERE IN THAT SNOW AND ICE AND IT LOOKED LOOKED PRETTY BAD, WELL, I FELT...

LEIA, I DON'T REALLY KNOW HOW TO SAY THIS. BUT YOU MUST KNOW THAT YOU... WELL... YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I... I...
UNCERTAIN, BUT DRAWN BY THE MOMENT, THE PRINCESS LEANS CLOSE TO THE YOUNG REBEL HERO...

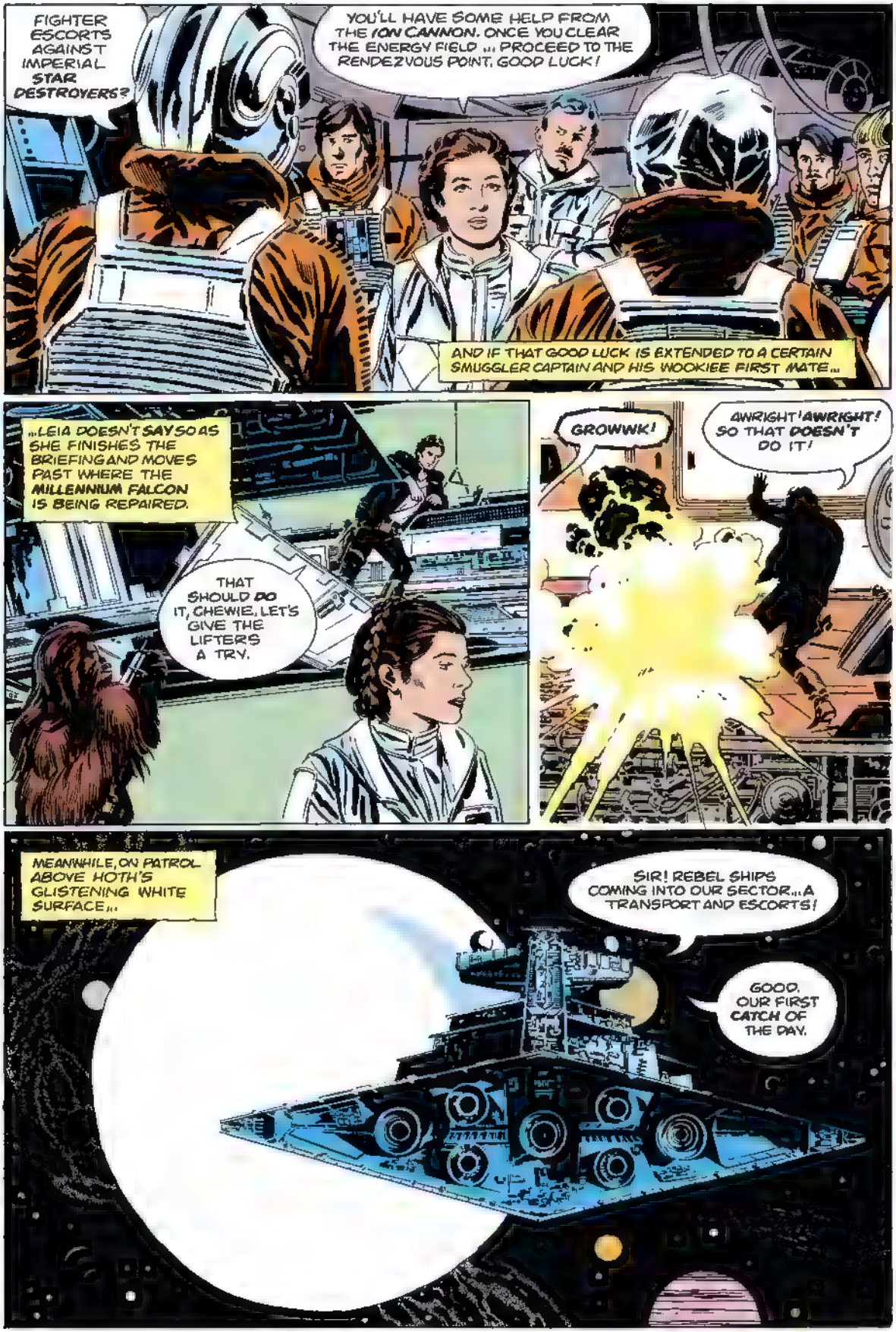
AND THE MOMENT PASSES. THE ONE-TIME SENATOR FROM ALDERAAN TURNS TO LEAVE...

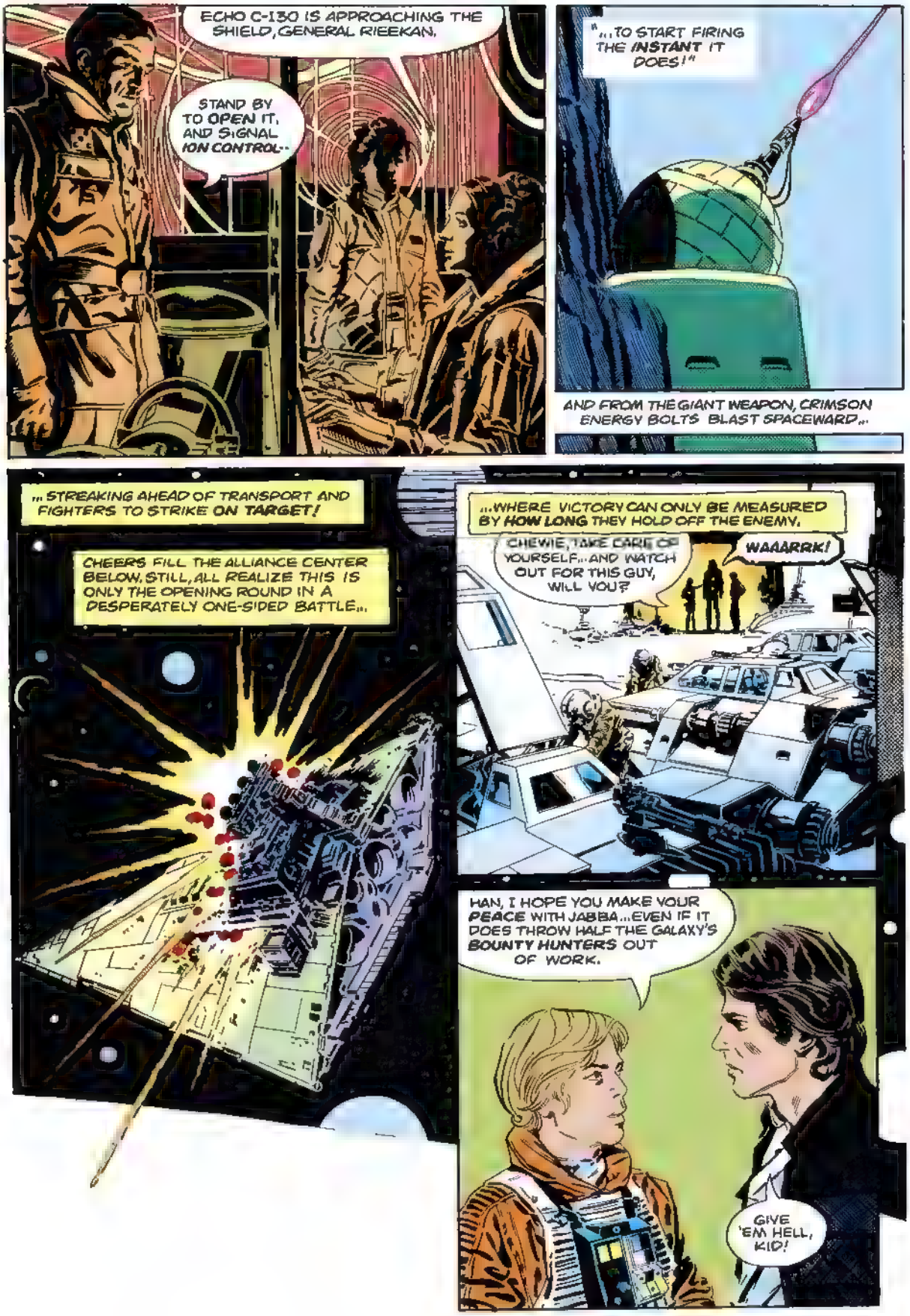
LEIA... WAIT!... W-WHAT WOULD YOU THINK IF... I WENT AWAY FOR A WHILE? TO ANOTHER SYSTEM... A PLACE CALLED DAGOBAH... I'VE GOT TO--
WHAT? THAT'S JUST FINE! FIRST HAN... NOW YOU! I COULD GET MORE LOYALTY IF I RECRUITED SOME OF THOSE ICE CREATURES WE'VE TRAPPED!

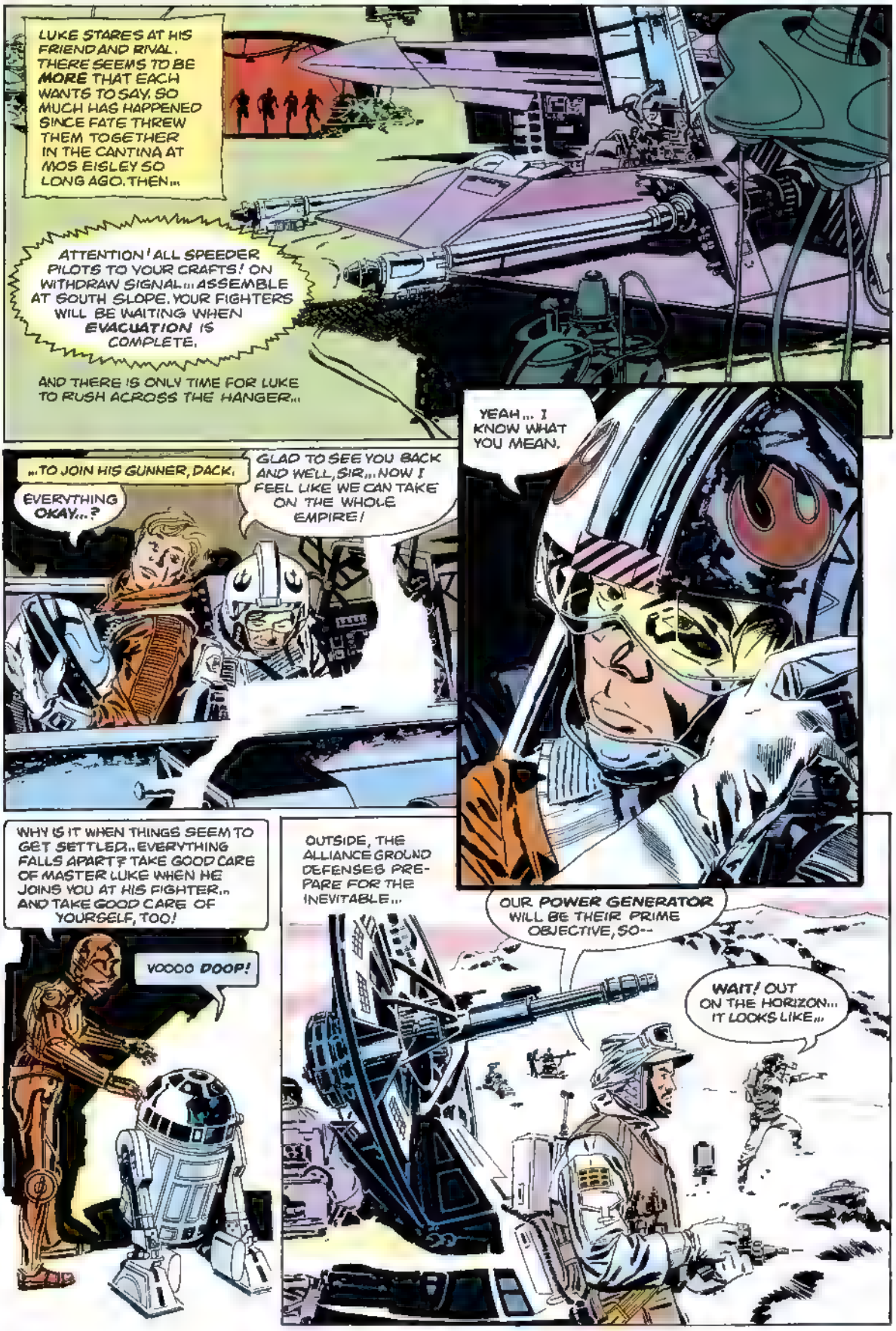
AH! SHE'S BEING CHARMING AGAIN. HI, KID! YOU LOOK STRONG ENOUGH TO WRESTLE A GUNDARK!
VAAARRK!
THANKS TO YOU, HAN. BETWEEN THE DEATH STAR TRENCH AND RESCUING ME AFTER I WANDERED AWAY DELIRIOUS FROM THAT MONSTER'S LAIR... THAT'S TWO I OWE YOU.
MAYBE YOU'LL GET TO RETURN THE FAVOR, KID. LOOKS LIKE HER WORSHIP HAS ARRANGED TO KEEP ME CLOSE BY... INSTEAD OF RUSHING OFF TO SETTLE ACCOUNTS WITH JABBA THE HUT.
I HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH DELAYING YOU HERE. GENERAL RIEEKAN THINKS IT'S DANGEROUS FOR ANY SHIPS TO LEAVE UNTIL WE KNOW FOR CERTAIN ABOUT THAT PROBE!
MAKES A GOOD STORY, LADY... BUT I THINK YOU JUST CAN'T BEAR TO LET ME OUT OF YOUR SIGHT. ESPECIALLY AFTER EXPRESSING YOUR TRUE FEELINGS WHEN WE WERE ALONE THE OTHER DAY.
I MUST BE RIGHT OR YOU WOULDN'T BE SO STEAMED. LOOK THAT WAY TO YOU, LUKE...?
WELL... YEAH... IT DOES, KIND OF...

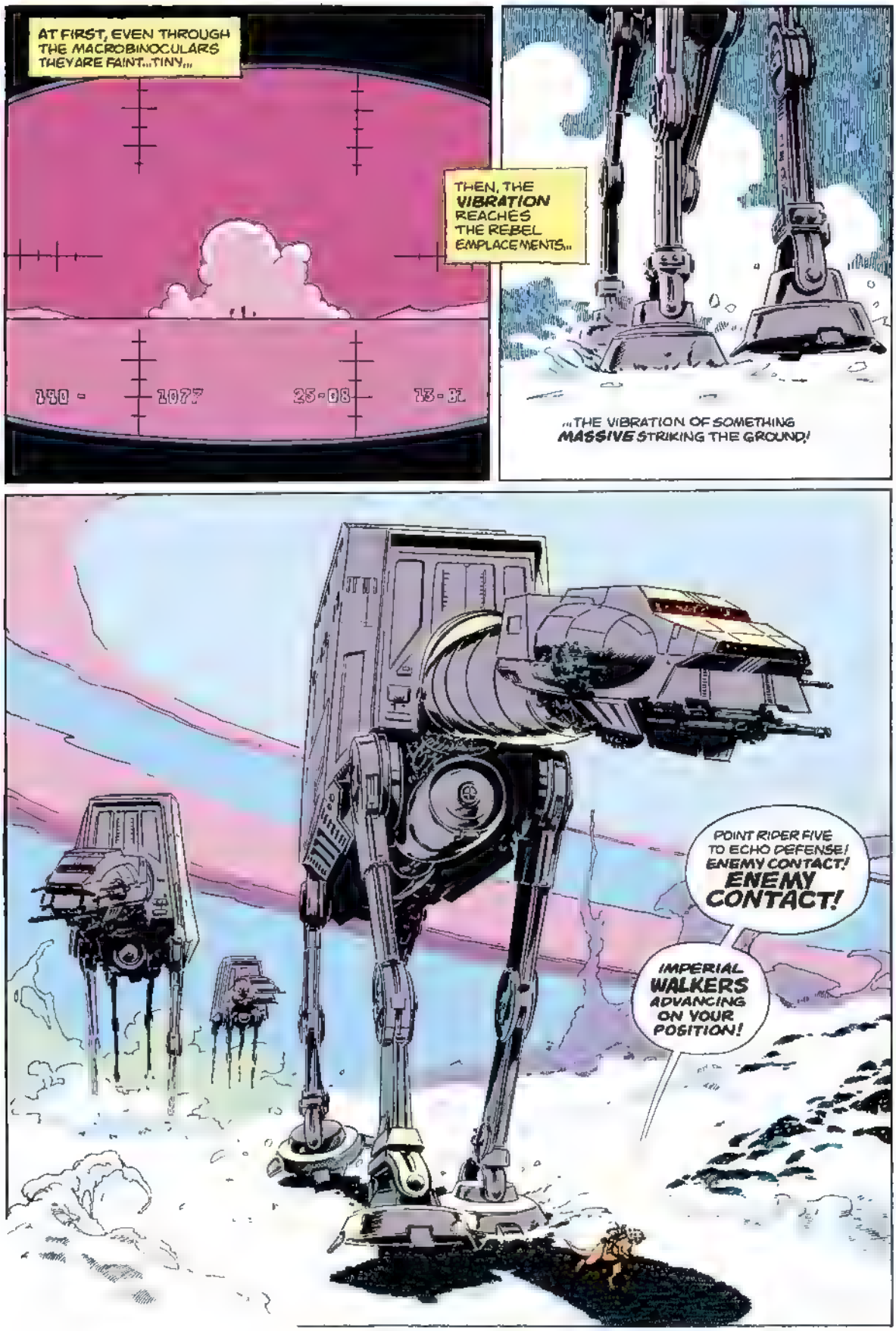

FOR AN INSTANT, THERE IS HURT IN LEIA ORGANA'S EYES. THEN SHE BECOMES THE PRINCESS AND ALLIANCE LEADER AGAIN. COOL...
...DEFIANT.
I GUESS NEITHER OF YOU UNDERSTANDS EVERYTHING ABOUT WOMEN...
DO YOU?!
ON THE EDGE OF THE HOTH SYSTEM, A HEARTBEAT BEFORE... THIS WAS BARREN SPACE. NOW... SIX SHIPS APPEAR.
FIVE ARE HUGE IMPERIAL STAR DESTROYERS. THE SIXTH DWARFS EVEN THESE!
WHAT IS IT, VEERS?
LORD VADER, THE FLEET HAS MOVED OUT OF LIGHT-SPEED...

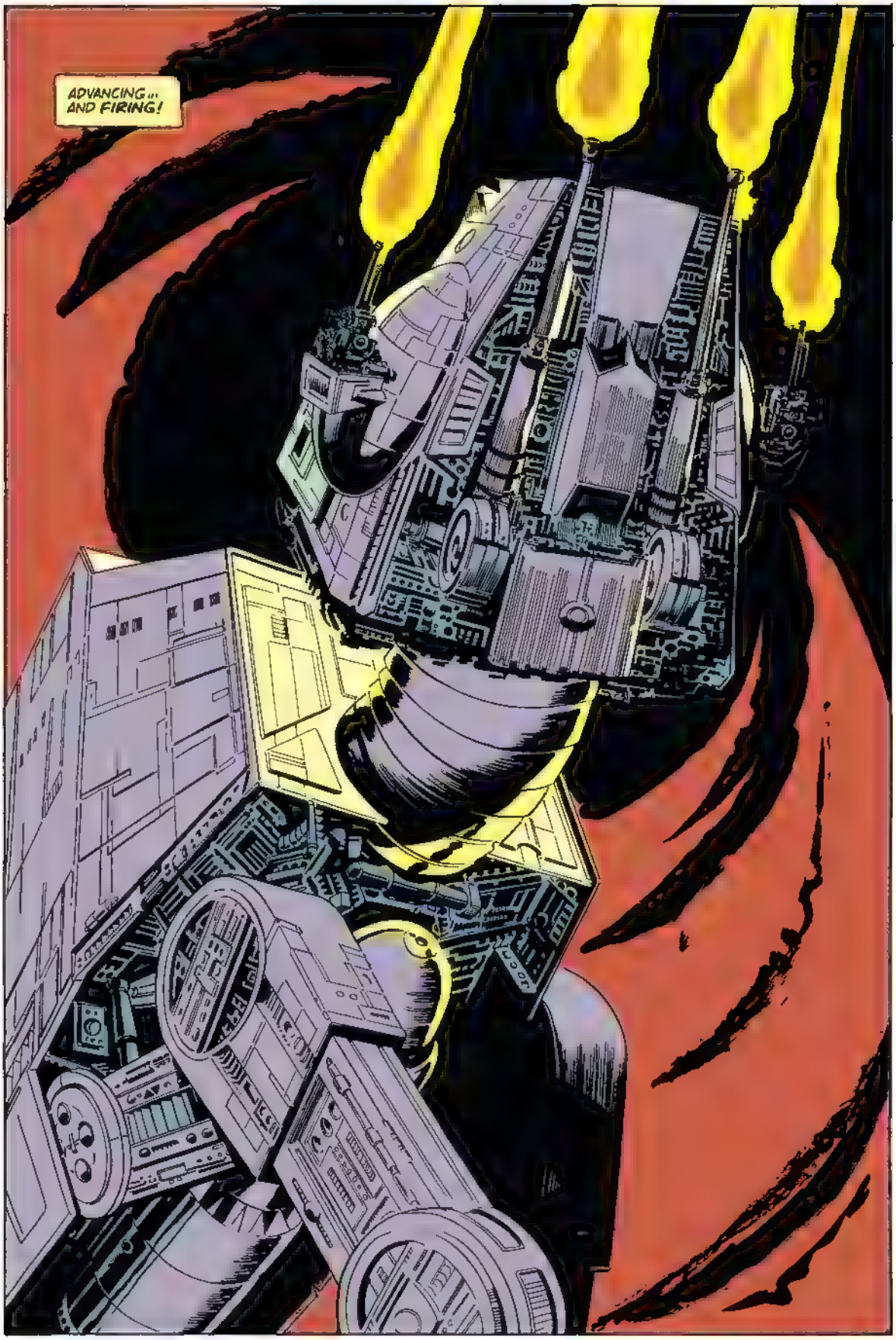
COM-SCAN HAS DETECTED AN ENERGY FIELD PROTECTING AN AREA OF THE SIXTH PLANET. THE FIELD IS STRONG ENOUGH TO DEFLECT ANY BOMBARDMENT.
THE REBEL SCUM ARE ALERTED TO OUR PRESENCE. OZZEL CAME OUT OF LIGHT-SPEED TOO CLOSE TO THE SYSTEM!
HE FELT SURPRISE WAS A WISER--
HE IS AS CLUMSY AS HE IS STUPID! A CLEAN BOMBARDMENT IS NOW IMPOSSIBLE! PREPARE YOUR TROOPS FOR A SURFACE ATTACK!
AND WITH A SWIRL OF HIS FLOWING CAPE, THE SITH LORD STALKS FROM THE CUBICLE...
...TO FACE THE ADMIRAL OF HIS FLEET.
MY LORD, THE SHIPS ARE ALL OUT OF LIGHT AND... AND... ;AGHHHHH!
CAPTAIN PIETT! MAKE READY TO LAND ASSAULT TROOPS BEYOND THE ENERGY FIELD... THEN DEPLOY OUR VESSELS SO THAT NOTHING CAN GET OFF THAT PLANET!
CHOKING... GASPING... THE IMPERIAL OFFICER FALLS!
SWIFTLY! YOU'RE IN COMMAND NOW!
--ADMIRAL PIETT!
WHILE ON THE SIXTH PLANET... THE ALERT IS NOW IN ITS FINAL STAGE. ACTIVITY IS AT ITS ZENITH. AND PRINCESS LEIA IS ADDRESSING PART OF HER COMMAND...
THE LARGE TRANSPORT SHIPS WILL LEAVE AS SOON AS THEY'RE LOADED. THE ENERGY SHIELD CAN ONLY BE OPENED FOR A SPLIT SECOND SO YOU ESCORTS HAVE TO STICK CLOSE!

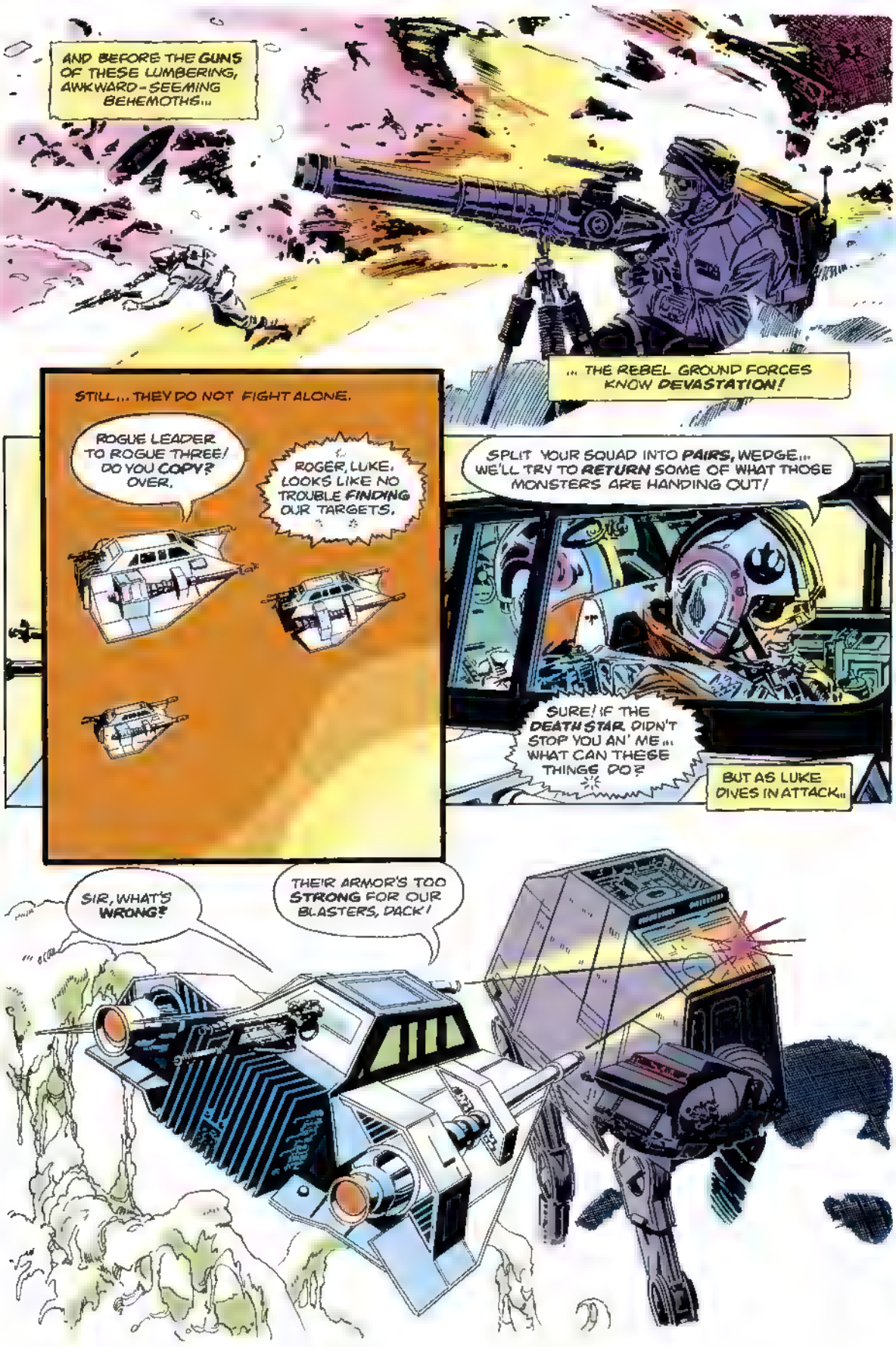

FIGHTER ESCORTS AGAINST IMPERIAL STAR DESTROYERS?
YOU'LL HAVE SOME HELP FROM THE ION CANNON. ONCE YOU CLEAR THE ENERGY FIELD ... PROCEED TO THE RENDEZVOUS POINT. GOOD LUCK!
AND IF THAT GOOD LUCK IS EXTENDED TO A CERTAIN SMUGGLER CAPTAIN AND HIS WOOKIEE FIRST MATE...
...LEIA DOESN'T SAY SO AS SHE FINISHES THE BRIEFING AND MOVES PAST WHERE THE MILLENNIUM FALCON IS BEING REPAIRED.
THAT SHOULD DO IT, CHEWIE. LET'S GIVE THE LIFTERS A TRY.
GROWWK!
AWRIGHT! AWRIGHT! SO THAT DOESN'T DO IT!
MEANWHILE, ON PATROL ABOVE HOTH'S GLISTENING WHITE SURFACE...
SIR! REBEL SHIPS COMING INTO OUR SECTOR... A TRANSPORT AND ESCORTS!
GOOD. OUR FIRST CATCH OF THE DAY.


ECHO C-130 IS APPROACHING THE SHIELD, GENERAL RIEEKAN.
STAND BY TO OPEN IT, AND SIGNAL ION CONTROL--
"...TO START FIRING THE INSTANT IT DOES!"
AND FROM THE GIANT WEAPON, CRIMSON ENERGY BOLTS BLAST SPACEWARD...
...STREAKING AHEAD OF TRANSPORT AND FIGHTERS TO STRIKE ON TARGET!
CHEERS FILL THE ALLIANCE CENTER BELOW, STILL, ALL REALIZE THIS IS ONLY THE OPENING ROUND IN A DESPERATELY ONE-SIDED BATTLE...
...WHERE VICTORY CAN ONLY BE MEASURED BY HOW LONG THEY HOLD OFF THE ENEMY.
CHEWIE, TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF...AND WATCH OUT FOR THIS GUY, WILL YOU?
WAAARRK!
HAN, I HOPE YOU MAKE YOUR PEACE WITH JABBA...EVEN IF IT DOES THROW HALF THE GALAXY'S BOUNTY HUNTERS OUT OF WORK.
GIVE 'EM HELL, KID!

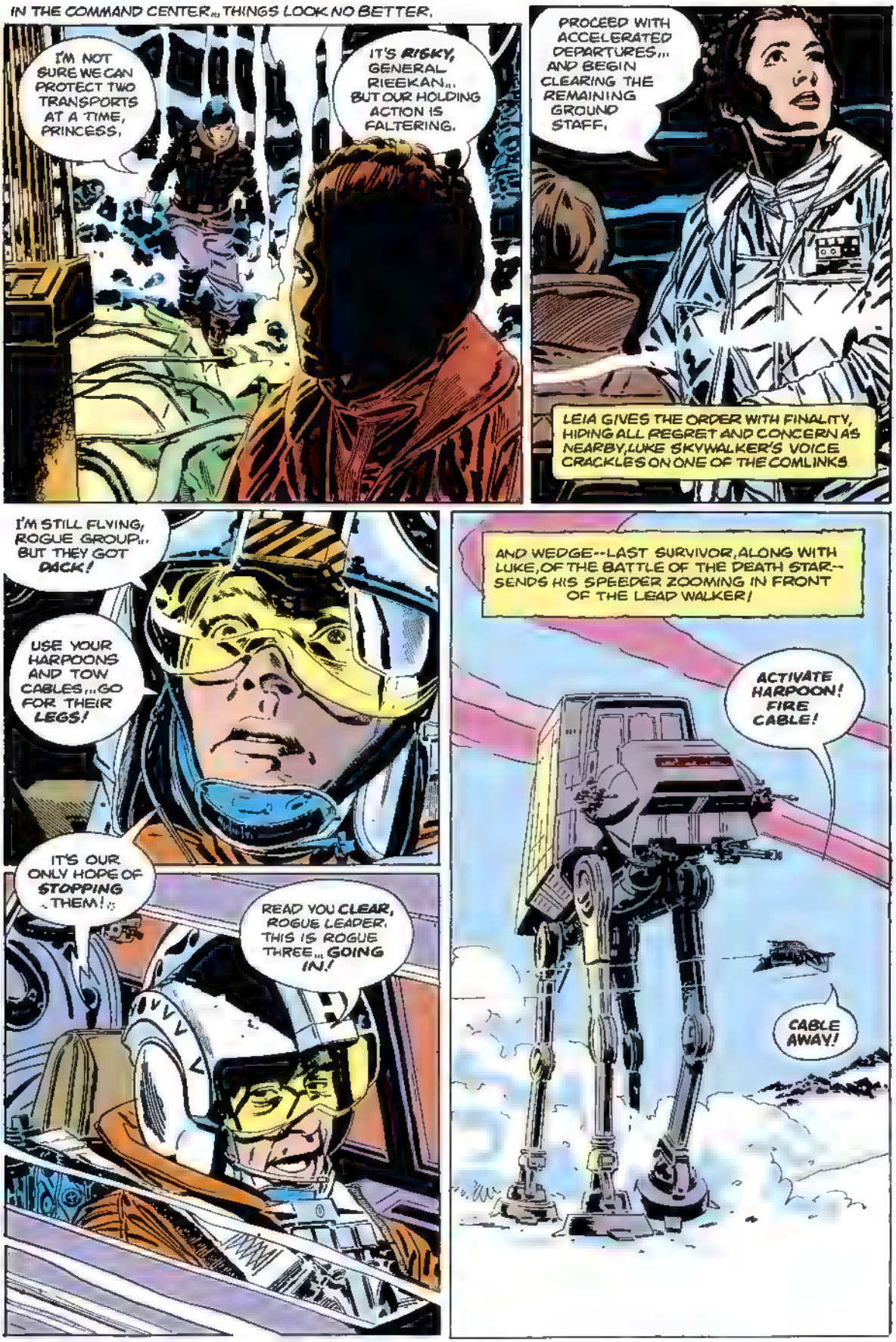

LUKE STARES AT HIS FRIEND AND RIVAL. THERE SEEMS TO BE MORE THAT EACH WANTS TO SAY. SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED SINCE FATE THREW THEM TOGETHER IN THE CANTINA AT MOS EISLEY SO LONG AGO. THEN...
ATTENTION! ALL SPEEDER PILOTS TO YOUR CRAFTS! ON WITHDRAW SIGNAL... ASSEMBLE AT SOUTH SLOPE. YOUR FIGHTERS WILL BE WAITING WHEN EVACUATION IS COMPLETE.
AND THERE IS ONLY TIME FOR LUKE TO RUSH ACROSS THE HANGER...
...TO JOIN HIS GUNNER, DACK.
EVERYTHING OKAY...?
GLAD TO SEE YOU BACK AND WELL, SIR... NOW I FEEL LIKE WE CAN TAKE ON THE WHOLE EMPIRE!
YEAH... I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.
WHY IS IT WHEN THINGS SEEM TO GET SETTLED.. EVERYTHING FALLS APART? TAKE GOOD CARE OF MASTER LUKE WHEN HE JOINS YOU AT HIS FIGHTER.. AND TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF, TOO!
VOOOO DOOP!
OUTSIDE, THE ALLIANCE GROUND DEFENSES PREPARE FOR THE INEVITABLE...
OUR POWER GENERATOR WILL BE THEIR PRIME OBJECTIVE, SO--
WAIT! OUT ON THE HORIZON... IT LOOKS LIKE...

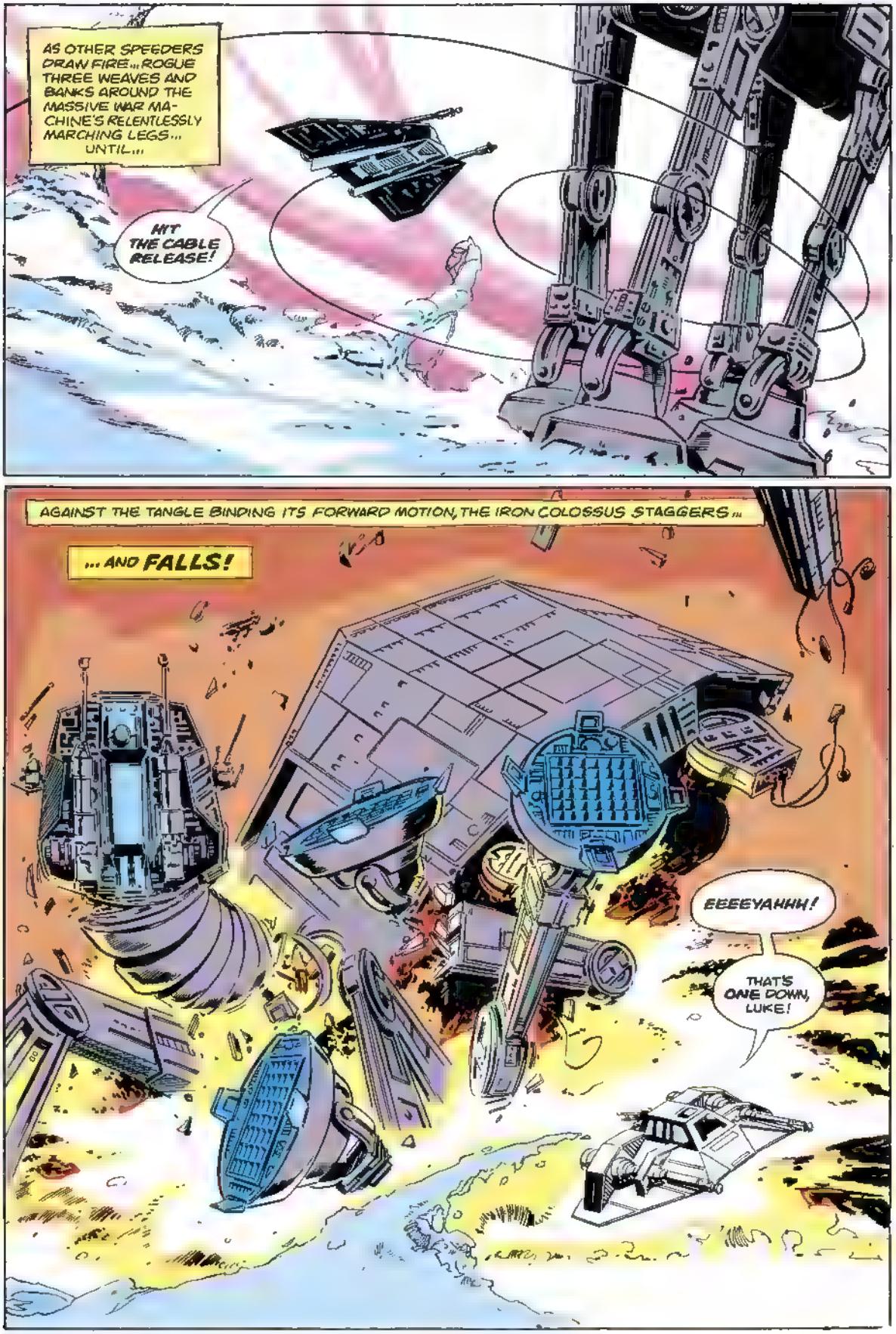

AT FIRST, EVEN THROUGH THE MACROBINOCULARS THEY ARE FAINT...TINY...
THEN, THE VIBRATION REACHES THE REBEL EMPLACEMENTS...
...THE VIBRATION OF SOMETHING MASSIVE STRIKING THE GROUND!
POINT RIDER FIVE TO ECHO DEFENSE! ENEMY CONTACT! ENEMY CONTACT!
IMPERIAL WALKERS ADVANCING ON YOUR POSITION!

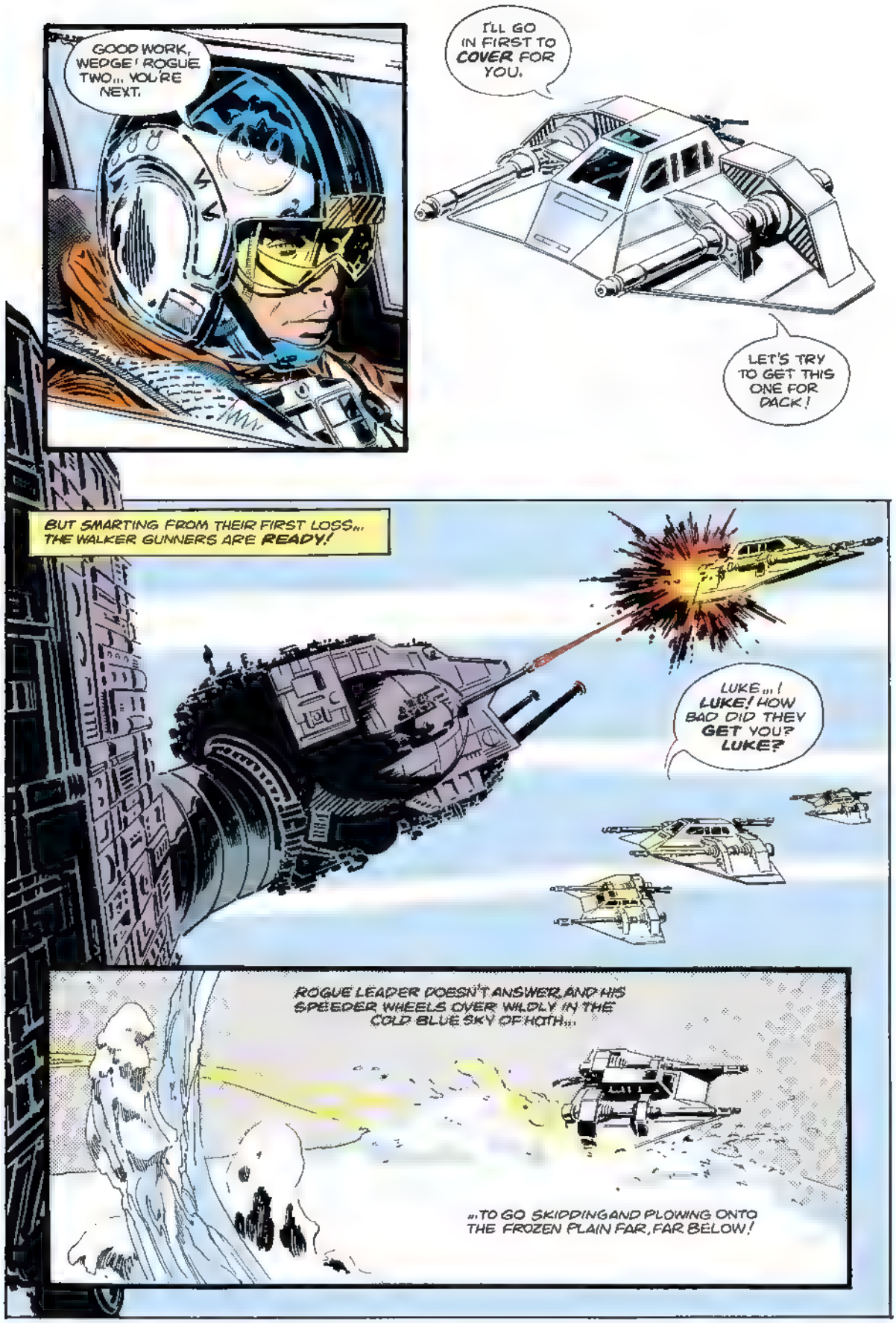

ADVANCING... AND FIRING!


AND BEFORE THE GUNS OF THESE LUMBERING, AWKWARD-SEEMING BEHEMOTHS...
... THE REBEL GROUND FORCES KNOW DEVASTATION!
STILL... THEY DO NOT FIGHT ALONE.
ROGUE LEADER TO ROGUE THREE! DO YOU COPY? OVER.
ROGER, LUKE. LOOKS LIKE NO TROUBLE FINDING OUR TARGETS.
SPLIT YOUR SQUAD INTO PAIRS, WEDGE... WE'LL TRY TO RETURN SOME OF WHAT THOSE MONSTERS ARE HANDING OUT!
SURE! IF THE DEATH STAR DIDN'T STOP YOU AN' ME... WHAT CAN THESE THINGS DO?
BUT AS LUKE DIVES IN ATTACK...
SIR, WHAT'S WRONG?
THEIR ARMOR'S TOO STRONG FOR OUR BLASTERS, DACK!

A SITUATION RAPIDLY EXPERIENCED BY EVERY SNOWSPEEDER...
FOR MANY... THE EXPERIENCE IS FATAL.
NO BETTER LUCK WITH MY GUNS, SIR!
WE'VE GOT TO CHANGE TACTICS, DACK. ONCE WE'RE IN THE CLEAR I'VE GOT AN IDEA WHAT TO--
BUT AS THE SNOWSPEEDER SOARS FROM THE STRIDING MECHANICAL GIANT...
WE'VE TAKEN A HIT! DACK, WHAT'S THE DAMAGE BACK THERE?
DACK...?!
THE RELENTLESS ENEMY BARRAGE IS FELT EVERYWHERE... INCLUDING THE ALLIANCE STRONGHOLD'S ALMOST DESERTED HANGAR.
FIRST CHANCE WE GET... WE'RE GIVING THIS CRATE A COMPLETE OVERHAUL. BUT UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, PAL... THAT WELD'S TIGHT ENOUGH.
IN FACT, I'D BET IT'S GONNA HOLD A LOT LONGER THAN THIS JOINT'S CEILING!

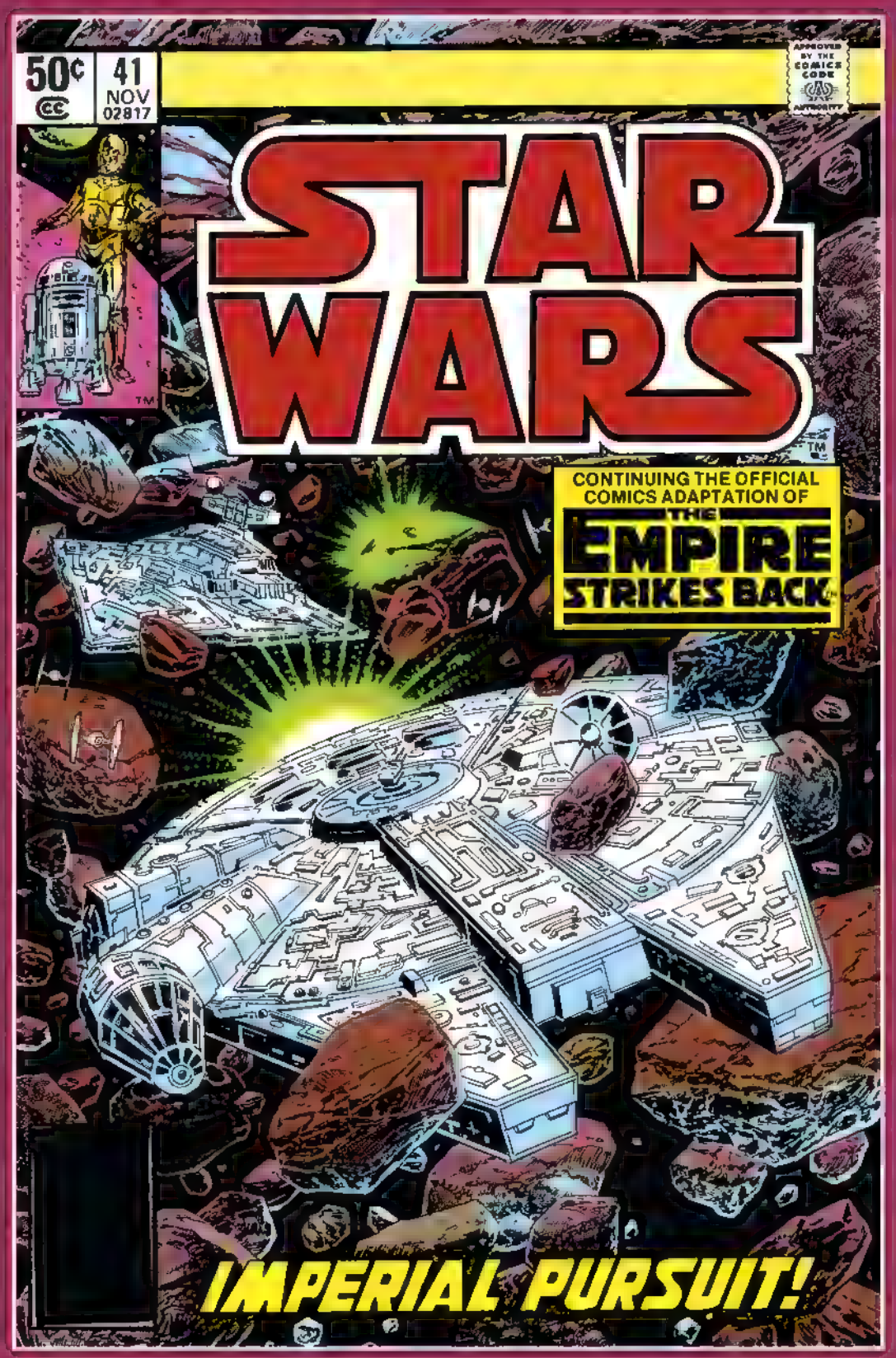

IN THE COMMAND CENTER... THINGS LOOK NO BETTER.
I'M NOT SURE WE CAN PROTECT TWO TRANSPORTS AT A TIME, PRINCESS.
IT'S RISKY, GENERAL RIEEKAN... BUT OUR HOLDING ACTION IS FALTERING.
PROCEED WITH ACCELERATED DEPARTURES... AND BEGIN CLEARING THE REMAINING GROUND STAFF.
LEIA GIVES THE ORDER WITH FINALITY, HIDING ALL REGRET AND CONCERN AS NEARBY, LUKE SKYWALKER'S VOICE CRACKLES ON ONE OF THE COMLINKS
I'M STILL FLYING, ROGUE GROUP... BUT THEY GOT PACK!
USE YOUR HARPOONS AND TOW CABLES... GO FOR THEIR LEGS!
IT'S OUR ONLY HOPE OF STOPPING THEM!
READ YOU CLEAR, ROGUE LEADER. THIS IS ROGUE THREE... GOING IN!
AND WEDGE--LAST SURVIVOR, ALONG WITH LUKE, OF THE BATTLE OF THE DEATH STAR--SENDS HIS SPEEDER ZOOMING IN FRONT OF THE LEAD WALKER!
ACTIVATE HARPOON! FIRE CABLE!
CABLE AWAY!


AS OTHER SPEEDERS DRAW FIRE... ROGUE THREE WEAVES AND BANKS AROUND THE MASSIVE WAR MACHINE'S RELENTLESSLY MARCHING LEGS... UNTIL...
HIT THE CABLE RELEASE!
AGAINST THE TANGLE BINDING ITS FORWARD MOTION, THE IRON COLOSSUS STAGGERS...
... AND FALLS!
EEEEYAHHH!
THAT'S ONE DOWN, LUKE!


GOOD WORK, WEDGE! ROGUE TWO... YOU'RE NEXT.
I'LL GO IN FIRST TO COVER FOR YOU.
LET'S TRY TO GET THIS ONE FOR DACK!
BUT SMARTING FROM THEIR FIRST LOSS... THE WALKER GUNNERS ARE READY!
LUKE...! LUKE! HOW BAD DID THEY GET YOU? LUKE?
ROGUE LEADER DOESN'T ANSWER, AND HIS SPEEDER WHEELS OVER WILDLY IN THE COLD BLUE SKY OF HOTH...
...TO GO SKIDDING AND PLOWING ONTO THE FROZEN PLAIN FAR, FAR BELOW!

FOR LONG MOMENTS, LUKE IS TOO STUNNED TO MOVE, UNTIL A CHILLING VIBRATION SHAKES THE WRECKAGE OF HIS CRAFT...
STILL IN ONE PIECE... ALL THIS SNOW LESSENED THE IMPACT, B-BUT... GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE...
SOMETHING'S COMING...
WITHIN HIS WALKER, GENERAL VEERS SMILES, THE REBEL DEFENSE AND EVACUATION ARE ABOUT TO CRUMBLE...
INCREASE SPEED--
WE ARE AT POINT 3.2.5, SIR... COMING WITHIN RANGE OF THEIR POWER GENERATOR.
--AND CRUSH ANYTHING THAT GETS IN OUR WAY!

NEXT ISSUE: **IMPERIAL PURSUIT!**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STAR WARS
CONTINUING THE OFFICIAL COMICS ADAPTATION OF
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IMPERIAL PURSUIT!

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THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
DARTH VADER HAS STRUCK! THE REBEL FORCES ON THE ICE PLANET OF HOTH MAKE A GALLANT LAST DEFENSE AS THE SITH LORD'S IMPERIAL TROOPS SWARM TOWARD THEIR STRONGHOLD, DETERMINED TO CUT OFF ANY ESCAPE.
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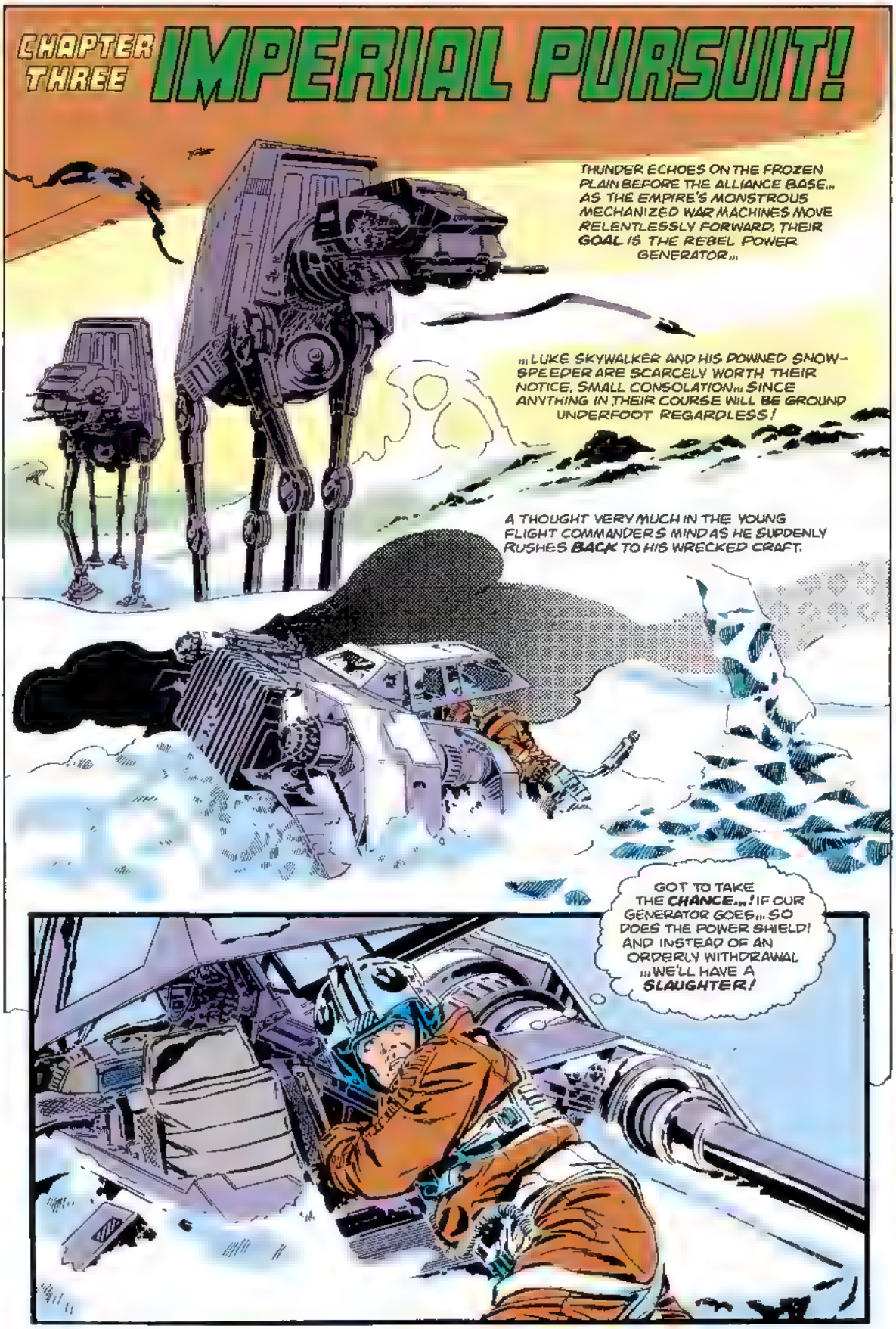
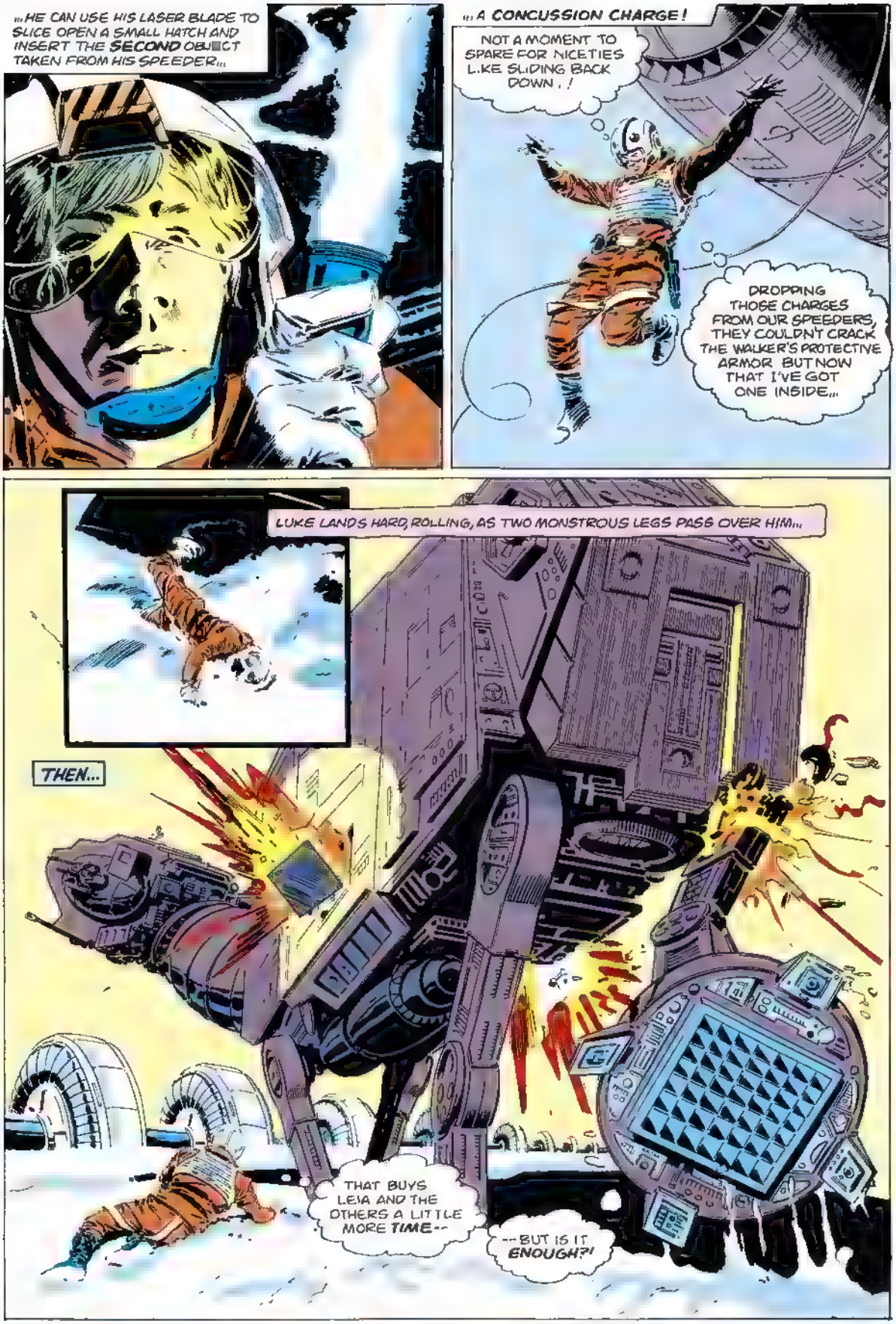

CHAPTER THREE
IMPERIAL PURSUIT!
THUNDER ECHOES ON THE FROZEN PLAIN BEFORE THE ALLIANCE BASE... AS THE EMPIRE'S MONSTROUS MECHANIZED WAR MACHINES MOVE RELENTLESSLY FORWARD, THEIR GOAL IS THE REBEL POWER GENERATOR...
"...LUKE SKYWALKER AND HIS DOWNED SNOW-SPEEDER ARE SCARCELY WORTH THEIR NOTICE, SMALL CONSOLATION... SINCE ANYTHING IN THEIR COURSE WILL BE GROUND UNDERFOOT REGARDLESS!
A THOUGHT VERY MUCH IN THE YOUNG FLIGHT COMMANDER'S MIND AS HE SUDDENLY RUSHES BACK TO HIS WRECKED CRAFT.
GOT TO TAKE THE CHANCE...! IF OUR GENERATOR GOES... SO DOES THE POWER SHIELD! AND INSTEAD OF AN ORDERLY WITHDRAWAL ...WE'LL HAVE A SLAUGHTER!

FIGHTING TO KEEP HIS BALANCE AS THE GROUND SHAKES BENEATH HIM, LUKE TURNS FROM THE COCKPIT WITH TWO OBJECTS...
...ONE IS A HARPOON GUN,
AND AS EVERY INSTINCT SCREAMS TO FLEE AWAY FROM THE GIANT SNOW WALKER...
...LUKE INSTEAD DARTS UNDER IT!
BOOM!
A MAGNETIC HEAD CLAMPS TO THE STRIDING MACHINE'S STEEL UNDERBELLY. SWIFTLY ATTACHING THE GUN'S CABLE DRUM TO HIS EQUIPMENT BELT...
...LUKE IS DRAWN UP...
...UP. UNTIL...


...HE CAN USE HIS LASER BLADE TO SLICE OPEN A SMALL HATCH AND INSERT THE SECOND OBJECT TAKEN FROM HIS SPEEDER...
...A CONCUSSION CHARGE!
NOT A MOMENT TO SPARE FOR NICETIES LIKE SLIDING BACK DOWN...!
DROPPING THOSE CHARGES FROM OUR SPEEDERS, THEY COULDN'T CRACK THE WALKER'S PROTECTIVE ARMOR BUT NOW THAT I'VE GOT ONE INSIDE...
LUKE LANDS HARD, ROLLING, AS TWO MONSTROUS LEGS PASS OVER HIM...
THEN...
THAT BUYS LEIA AND THE OTHERS A LITTLE MORE TIME--
--BUT IS IT ENOUGH?!

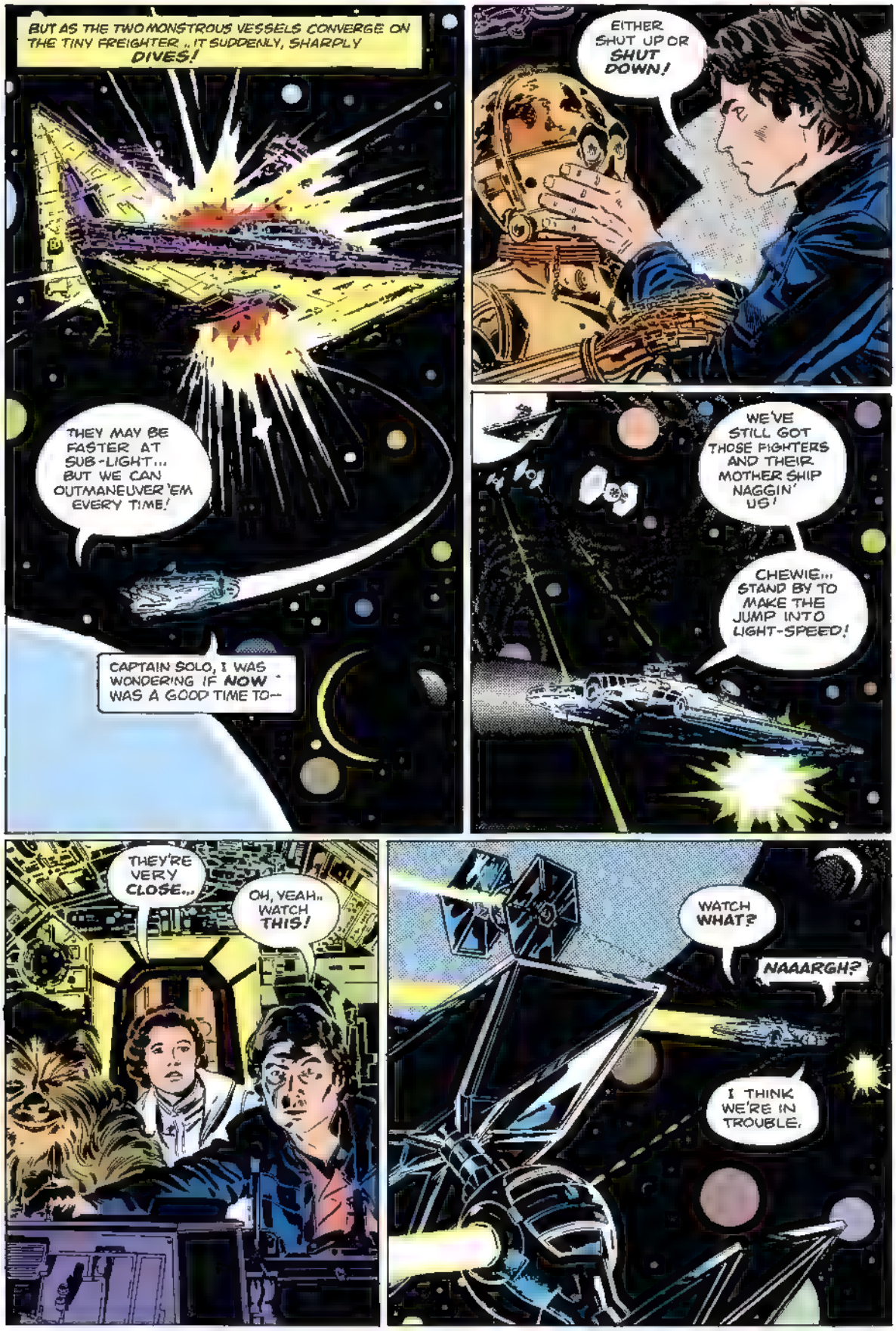
REBEL COMMAND! AND THE INCREASING THUNDER OF LASER BLASTS, HAN SOLO PUSHES FORWARD THROUGH ICE AND DEBRIS...
I HEARD THE CENTER TOOK A HIT, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
SO FAR, I...I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU'D BE CONCERNED WITH REPAIRS TO THE FALCON TO WORRY ABOUT AND--
COME ON! A LITTLE MORE POUNDING AND THE WHOLE PLACE WILL GO TO PIECES. YOU'VE GOT TO GET TO YOUR SHIP.
W-WAIT!
GIVE THE EVACUATION CODE SIGNAL... AND GET TO THE TRANSPORT!
YES, YOUR HIGHNESS! ALL UNITS... ALL UNITS! DISENGAGE... DISENGAGE! BEGIN RETREAT ACTION!
THAT MEANS YOU TOO, BRONZE BRITCHES! LET'S HIT THE CORRIDORS!
PERHAPS YOU RE RIGHT, SIR... THINGS ARE DEFINITELY FALLING APART HERE!
BUT ONCE IN THE CORRIDORS...

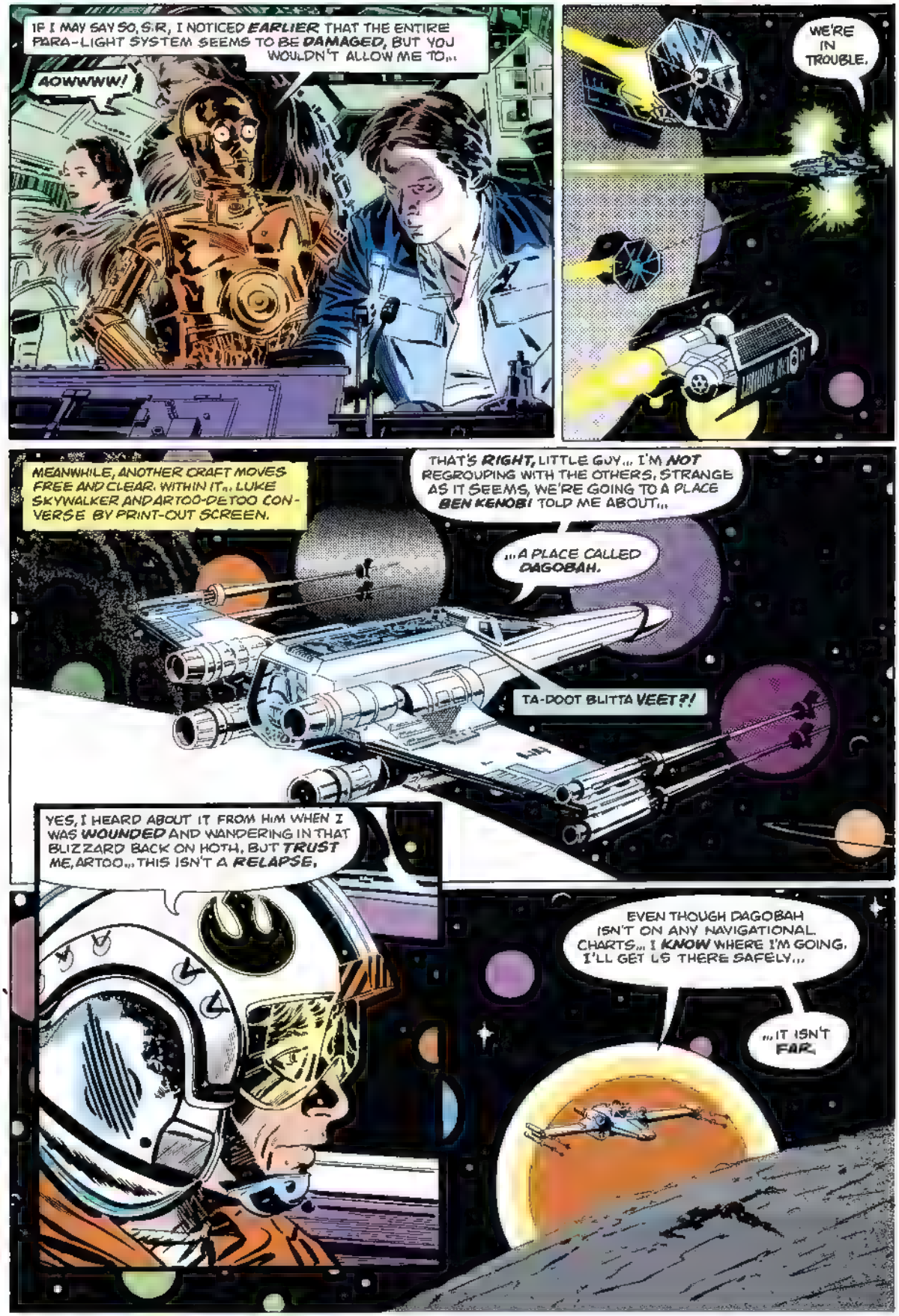
BETTER FORGET THE TRANSPORT, YOUR ROYALNESS... WE'RE CUT OFF FROM REACHING IT BUT GOOD!
FEELS LIKE THEY NAILED THE MAIN GENERATOR... NO MORE SHIELD! IMPERIALS CAN LAND AT WILL... THEY'RE GONNA SWARM IN HERE LIKE FLIES AROUND A BANTHA!
RETURNING TO THE COMMAND CENTER IS OUT OF THE QUESTION NOW. ANY IDEAS, FLYBOY?
IF WE'RE LUCKY... WE CAN STILL MAKE IT TO THE FALCON!
AND AT THE STRONGHOLD'S MAIN HANGAR, AN ANXIOUSLY PACING WOOKIEE IS THINKING THE SAME THING... AS THE CAVERN CRUMBLES MORE UNDER THE EMPIRE'S MOUNTING ASSAULT!
THEN...
AWWRK?
IT'S US ALLRIGHT, YOU BIG FURBALL! START CRANKIN' HER UP... I WANNA SET SOME KINDA' RECORD FOR FAST TAKE-OFFS!
THERE IS GOOD REASON FOR HASTE. SOMEWHERE BEHIND THEM, THE LAST DEFENSES FALL BEFORE ADVANCING STORMTROOPERS...
NOW JOINED PERSONALLY BY THEIR SUPREME COMMANDER.

WHILE IN THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S COCKPIT...
THAT STILL DOESN'T DO IT CHEWIE? I THOUGHT OUR REPAIRS HAD ALL THIS LICKED.
WOULD IT HELP IF I GOT OUT AND PUSHED?
CAPTAIN SOLO, PERHAPS I COULD MAKE A SUG--
ER... NEVER MIND IT CAN WAIT.
NOT MUCH ELSE CAN! WE'VE GOT COMPANY IN THE HANGAR... SETTING UP A LASER CANNON!
THIS BUCKET OF BOLTS IS NEVER GOING TO GET US PAST THEM... MUCH LESS THE IMPERIAL BLOCKADE!
NO PROBLEM, LADY! THIS BABY'S STILL GOT A FEW SURPRISES LEFT IN HER!

I'LL BE SURPRISED IF WE START MOVING!
CHEWIE, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO SWITCH OVER TO AUXILIARY AND HOPE FOR THE BEST!
SOMEDAY YOU'RE GOING TO BE WRONG AND I HOPE I'M THERE TO SEE IT.
PUNCH IT, CHEWIE!
THE ICE CAVERN EXPLODES WITH THE SOUND OF THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S MAIN ENGINES, AND AS IMPERIAL TROOPS REEL FROM THE CONCUSSION...
...THE SMUGGLING CRAFT SOARS CLEAR! CLIMBING TOWARD THE SKIES...
FROM THE DIRECTION OF HIS OWN X-WING COMES A NAGGING ELECTRONIC BLEEP...
ACTIVATE THE POWER AND STOP WORRYING, ARTOO. WE'LL SOON BE AIRBORNE.
...CLIMBING PAST A GROUP OF REBEL PILOTS WHO HAVE REACHED THEIR HIDDEN FIGHTER CRAFT.
AT LEAST HAN GOT AWAY. WEDGE, YOU AND THE OTHERS TAKE TO YOUR SHIPS!
GOOD LUCK, LUKE! SEE YOU AT THE RENDEZVOUS!
BUT AS THE FALCON BECOMES A TWINKLE IN HOTH'S COLD BLUE SKY, LUKE WONDERS WHEN HE'LL SEE HIS FRIENDS AGAIN. FOR HIS RENDEZVOUS WILL NOT BE THE ONE DETERMINED BY THE REBEL ALLIANCE.

WITH LUKE SKYWALKER'S DEPARTURE... THE ICE PLANET IS LEFT TO ITS CONQUERORS.
SEVENTEEN SHIPS DESTROYED, LORD VADER. WE DON'T KNOW HOW MANY GOT AWAY.
BUT THE FLEET'S TRACKING SCANNERS ARE ON THE MILLENNIUM FALCON.
I WANT THAT SHIP!
AND THOSE CHARGED WITH MAINTAINING THE IMPERIAL BLOCKADE ARE STRIVING TO SEE THAT THE SITH LORD IS NOT DISAPPOINTED!
WARRRWK!
I KNOW, I KNOW, CHEWIE! TWO STAR DESTROYERS HEADIN' STRAIGHT FOR US... AN' WE STILL GOT THE OTHER ONE AND ITS TIE FIGHTERS ON OUR TAIL!
I'M GLAD YOU SAID THERE'D BE NO PROBLEM, HOT-SHOT... OTHERWISE I MIGHT BE WORRIED.


BUT AS THE TWO MONSTROUS VESSELS CONVERGE ON THE TINY FREIGHTER .. IT SUDDENLY, SHARPLY DIVES!
THEY MAY BE FASTER AT SUB-LIGHT... BUT WE CAN OUTMANEUVER 'EM EVERY TIME!
CAPTAIN SOLO, I WAS WONDERING IF NOW WAS A GOOD TIME TO--
EITHER SHUT UP OR SHUT DOWN!
WE'VE STILL GOT THOSE FIGHTERS AND THEIR MOTHER SHIP NAGGIN' US!
CHEWIE... STAND BY TO MAKE THE JUMP INTO LIGHT-SPEED!
THEY'RE VERY CLOSE...
OH, YEAH.. WATCH THIS!
WATCH WHAT?
NAAARGH?
I THINK WE'RE IN TROUBLE.


IF I MAY SAY SO, S.R, I NOTICED EARLIER THAT THE ENTIRE PARA-LIGHT SYSTEM SEEMS TO BE DAMAGED, BUT YOU WOULDN'T ALLOW ME TO...
AOWWWW!
WE'RE IN TROUBLE.
MEANWHILE, ANOTHER CRAFT MOVES FREE AND CLEAR. WITHIN IT... LUKE SKYWALKER AND ARTOO-DETOO CONVERSE BY PRINT-OUT SCREEN.
THAT'S RIGHT, LITTLE GUY... I'M NOT REGROUPING WITH THE OTHERS. STRANGE AS IT SEEMS, WE'RE GOING TO A PLACE BEN KENOBI TOLD ME ABOUT...
...A PLACE CALLED DAGOBAH.
TA-DOOT BLITTA VEET?!
YES, I HEARD ABOUT IT FROM HIM WHEN I WAS WOUNDED AND WANDERING IN THAT BLIZZARD BACK ON HOTH. BUT TRUST ME, ARTOO... THIS ISN'T A RELAPSE.
EVEN THOUGH DAGOBAH ISN'T ON ANY NAVIGATIONAL CHARTS... I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING. I'LL GET US THERE SAFELY...
...IT ISN'T FAR.

BUT AS THE YOUNG WARRIOR FROM THE DESERT WORLD OF TATOOINE PROCEEDS WITH CONFIDENCE... HIS FRIENDS ABOARD THE MILLENNIUM FALCON TRY TO MAINTAIN WHAT'S LEFT OF THEIRS!
HORIZONTAL BOOSTER... ALLUVIAL DAMPER... CHEWIE! GET ME THE HYDROSPANNERS!
I DON'T KNOW HOW WE'RE GONNA' GET OUT OF THIS ONE!

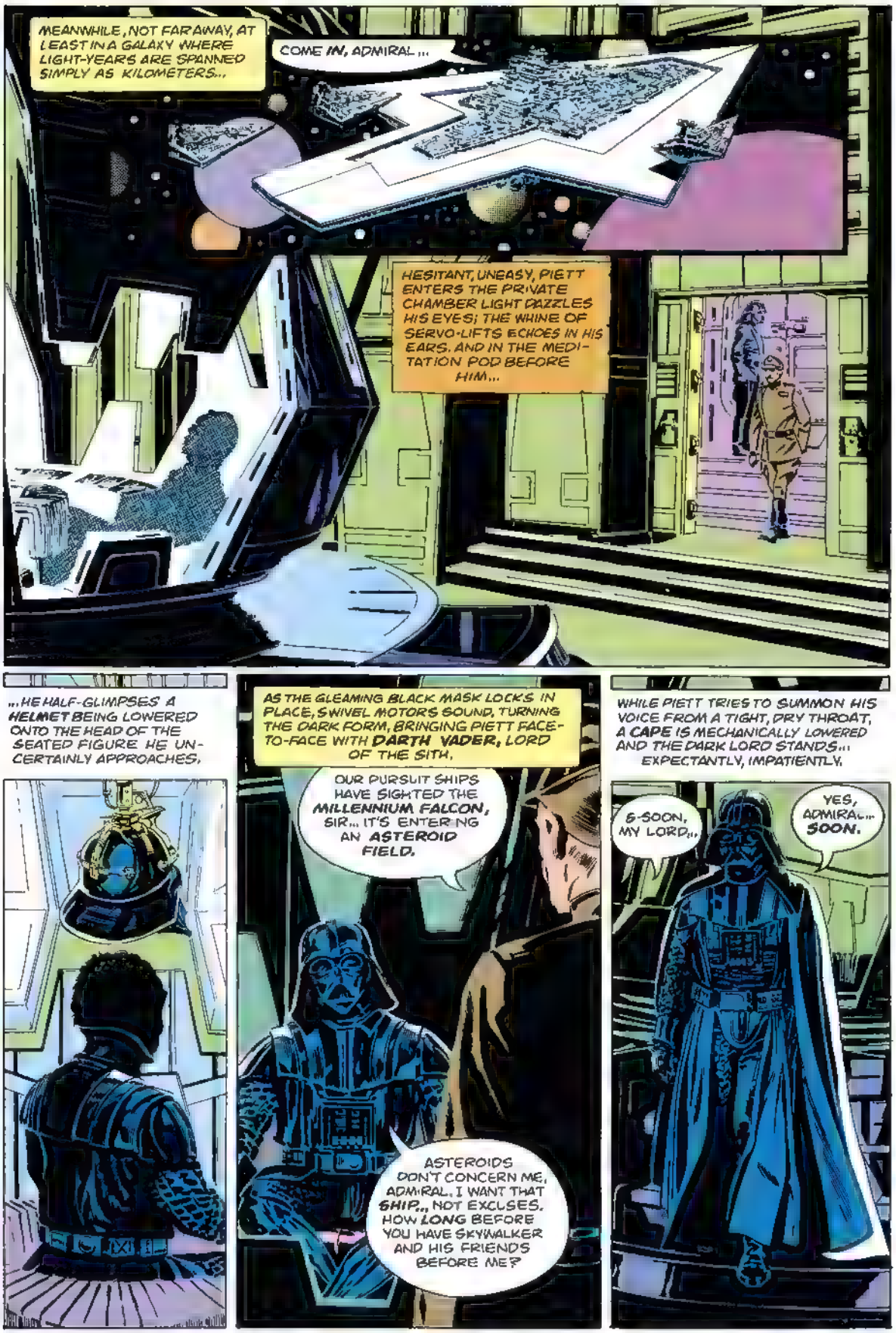
AND BEFORE MATTERS GET BETTER... THEY USUALLY GET WORSE! VIOLENT IMPACT SUDDENLY ROCKS THE CORELLIAN'S FREIGHTER!
THAT WAS NO LASER BLAST! SOMETHING SOLID HIT US!
HAN...! HAN! GET UP HERE TO THE COCKPIT... FAST!

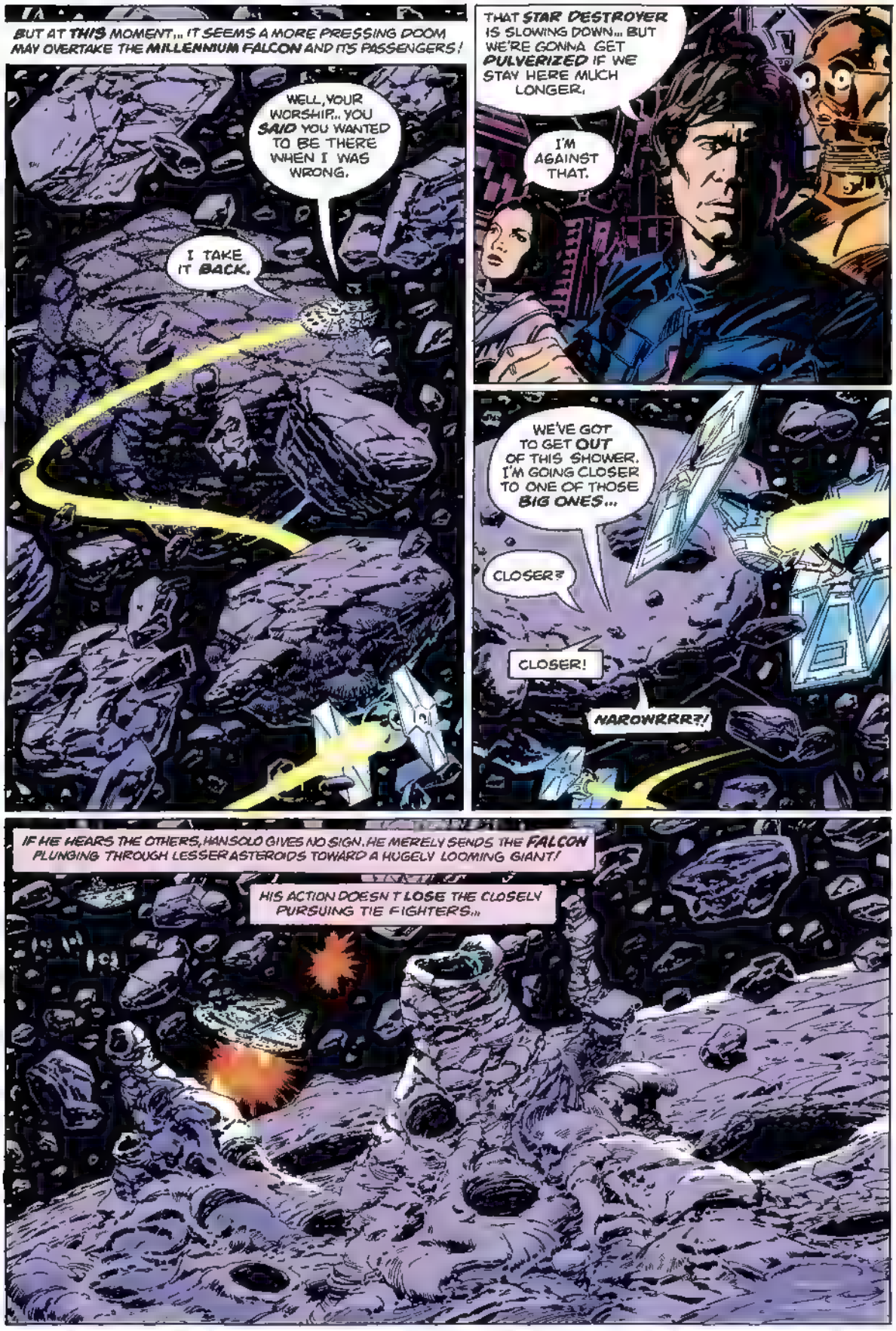
ASTEROIDS!

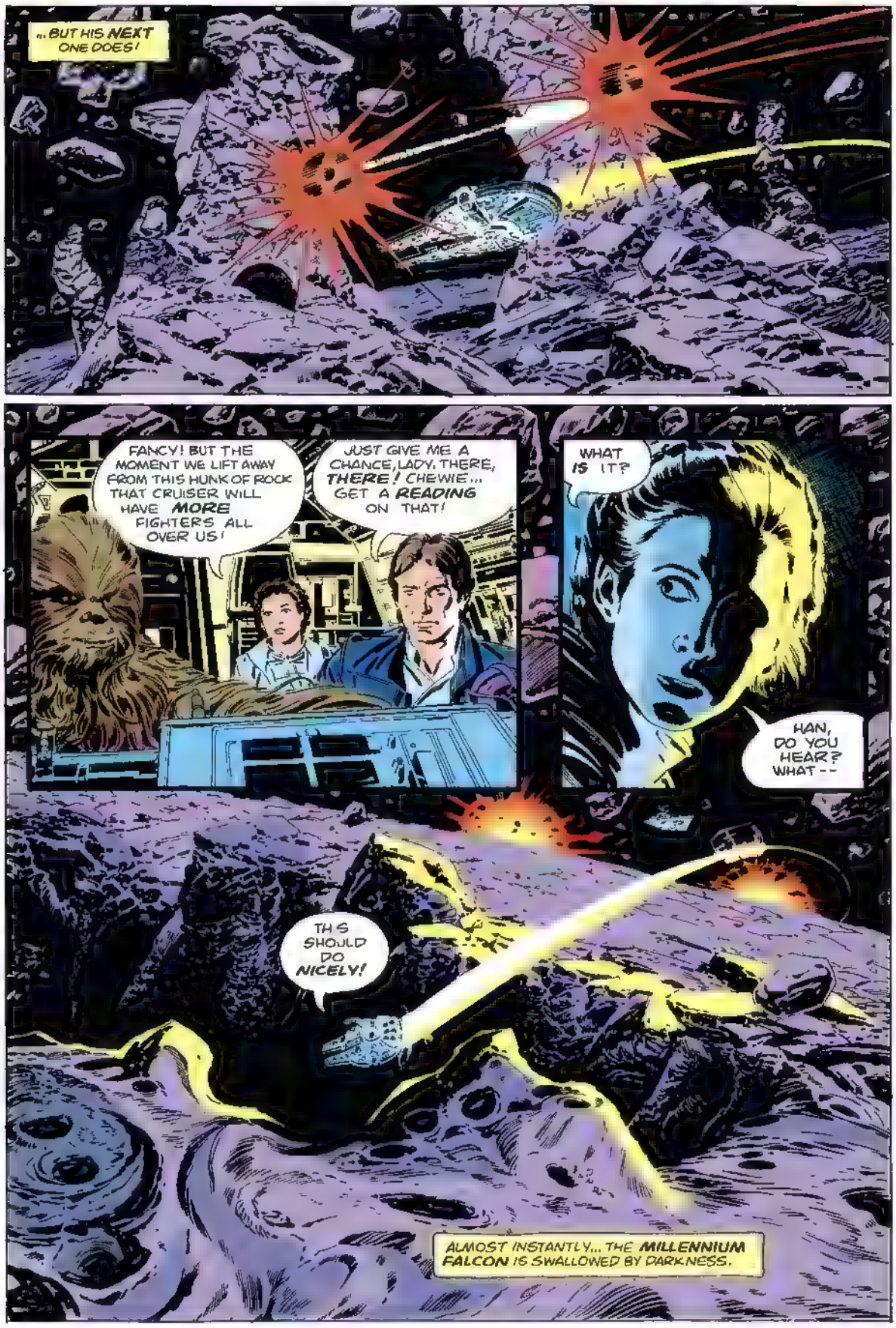
MOVE IT, BRIGHT-EYES... LET US GET TO THE CONTROLS!
CHEWIE -- SET COURSE 2-7-1!

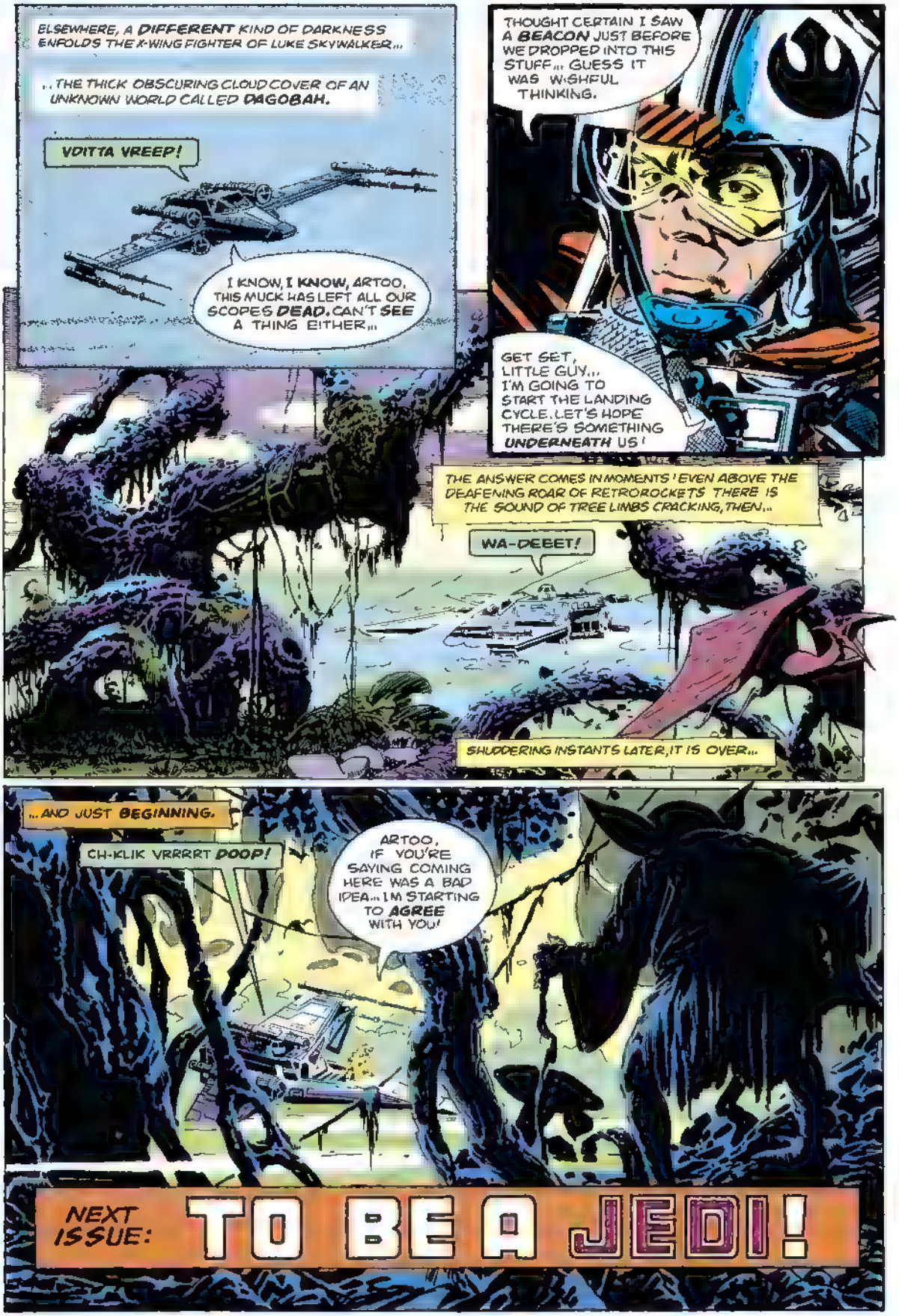
YOU'RE NOT SERIOUSLY GOING INTO AN ASTEROID FIELD?
IF I MIGHT REMIND YOU, CAPTAIN, THE PROBABILITY OF SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING SUCH AN OBSTACLE IS APPROXIMATELY 2,467 TO 1!

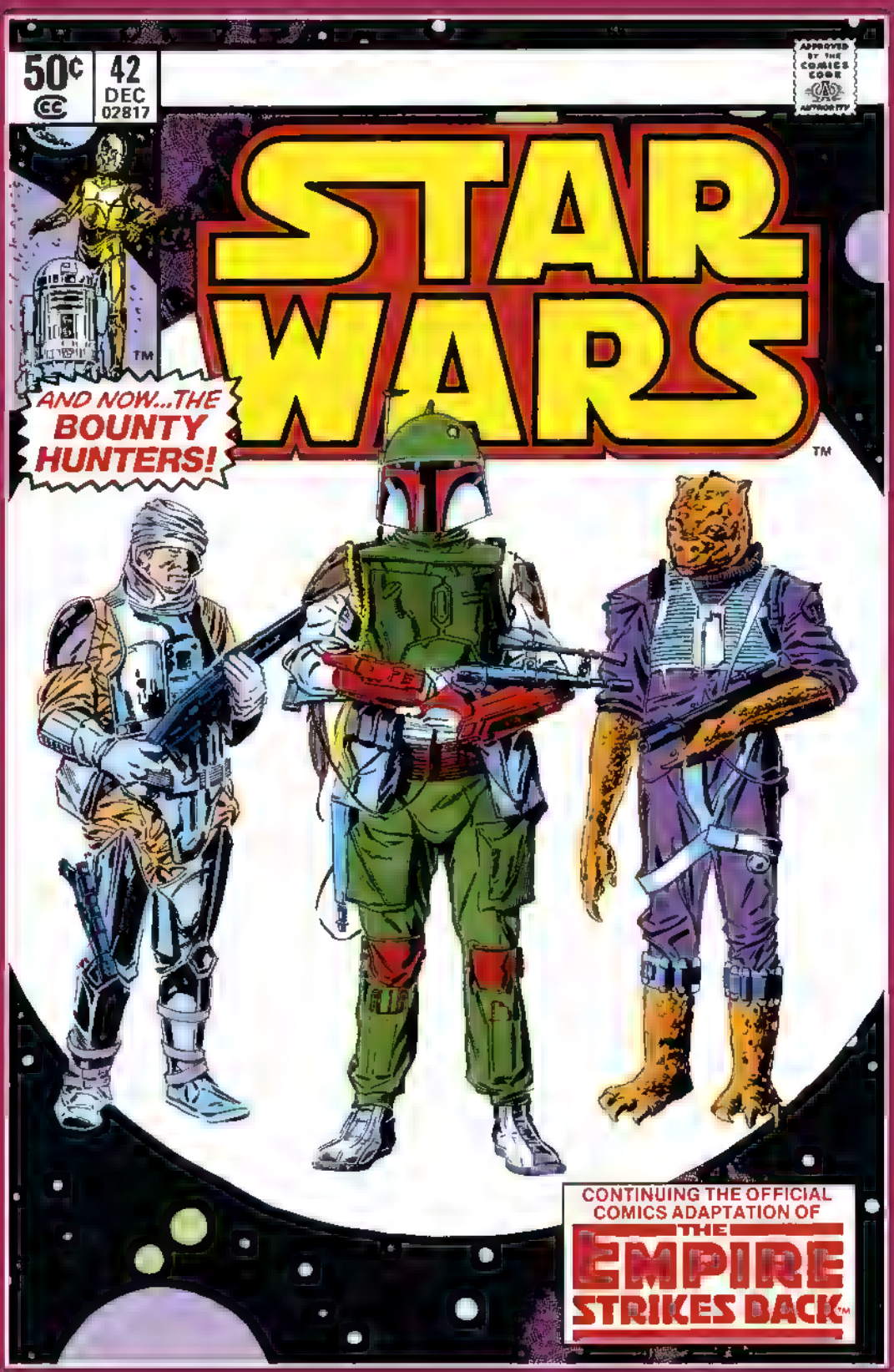
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS TO IMPRESS ME.
HANG ON, SWEETHEART... WE'RE GONNA' DO SOME FLYIN'!
AND BANKING WITH ALMOST SICKENING SWIFTNESS... THE SMUGGLING CRAFT SWINGS INTO THE ON-COMING MAELSTROM OF FLYING ROCK!
IT IS A MANEUVER THE PURSUING TIE FIGHTERS IMMEDIATELY EMULATE WITH LESS IMMEDIATE SUCCESS!


MEANWHILE, NOT FAR AWAY, AT LEAST IN A GALAXY WHERE LIGHT-YEARS ARE SPANNED SIMPLY AS KILOMETERS...
COME IN, ADMIRAL...
HESITANT, UNEASY, PIETT ENTERS THE PRIVATE CHAMBER LIGHT DAZZLES HIS EYES; THE WHINE OF SERVO-LIFTS ECHOES IN HIS EARS. AND IN THE MEDITATION POD BEFORE HIM...
...HE HALF-GLIMPSES A HELMET BEING LOWERED ONTO THE HEAD OF THE SEATED FIGURE HE UNCERTAINLY APPROACHES.
AS THE GLEAMING BLACK MASK LOCKS IN PLACE, SWIVEL MOTORS SOUND, TURNING THE DARK FORM, BRINGING PIETT FACE-TO-FACE WITH DARTH VADER, LORD OF THE SITH.
OUR PURSUIT SHIPS HAVE SIGHTED THE MILLENNIUM FALCON, SIR... IT'S ENTERING AN ASTEROID FIELD.
ASTEROIDS DON'T CONCERN ME, ADMIRAL. I WANT THAT SHIP... NOT EXCUSES. HOW LONG BEFORE YOU HAVE SKYWALKER AND HIS FRIENDS BEFORE ME?
WHILE PIETT TRIES TO SUMMON HIS VOICE FROM A TIGHT, DRY THROAT, A CAPE IS MECHANICALLY LOWERED AND THE DARK LORD STANDS... EXPECTANTLY, IMPATIENTLY.
S-SOON, MY LORD...
YES, ADMIRAL... SOON.


BUT AT THIS MOMENT... IT SEEMS A MORE PRESSING DOOM MAY OVERTAKE THE MILLENNIUM FALCON AND ITS PASSENGERS!
WELL, YOUR WORSHIP... YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO BE THERE WHEN I WAS WRONG.
I TAKE IT BACK.
THAT STAR DESTROYER IS SLOWING DOWN... BUT WE'RE GONNA GET PULVERIZED IF WE STAY HERE MUCH LONGER.
I'M AGAINST THAT.
WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF THIS SHOWER. I'M GOING CLOSER TO ONE OF THOSE BIG ONES...
CLOSER?
CLOSER!
NARROWRRR?!
IF HE HEARS THE OTHERS, HAN SOLO GIVES NO SIGN. HE MERELY SENDS THE FALCON PLUNGING THROUGH LESSER ASTEROIDS TOWARD A HUGELY LOOMING GIANT!
HIS ACTION DOESN'T LOSE THE CLOSELY PURSUING TIE FIGHTERS...


...BUT HIS NEXT ONE DOES!
FANCY! BUT THE MOMENT WE LIFT AWAY FROM THIS HUNK OF ROCK THAT CRUISER WILL HAVE MORE FIGHTERS ALL OVER US!
JUST GIVE ME A CHANCE, LADY. THERE, THERE! CHEWIE... GET A READING ON THAT!
WHAT IS IT?
HAN, DO YOU HEAR? WHAT--
TH S SHOULD DO NICELY!
ALMOST INSTANTLY... THE MILLENNIUM FALCON IS SWALLOWED BY DARKNESS.


ELSEWHERE, A DIFFERENT KIND OF DARKNESS ENFOLDS THE X-WING FIGHTER OF LUKE SKYWALKER...
...THE THICK OBSCURING CLOUD COVER OF AN UNKNOWN WORLD CALLED DAGOBAH.
VDITTA VREEP!
I KNOW, I KNOW, ARTOO, THIS MUCK HAS LEFT ALL OUR SCOPES DEAD. CAN'T SEE A THING EITHER...
THOUGHT CERTAIN I SAW A BEACON JUST BEFORE WE DROPPED INTO THIS STUFF... GUESS IT WAS WISHFUL THINKING.
GET SET, LITTLE GUY... I'M GOING TO START THE LANDING CYCLE. LET'S HOPE THERE'S SOMETHING UNDERNEATH US!
THE ANSWER COMES IN MOMENTS! EVEN ABOVE THE DEAFENING ROAR OF RETROROCKETS THERE IS THE SOUND OF TREE LIMBS CRACKING, THEN...
WA-DEEET!
SHUDDERING INSTANTS LATER, IT IS OVER...
...AND JUST BEGINNING.
CH-KLIK VRRRRT DOOP!
ARTOO, IF YOU'RE SAYING COMING HERE WAS A BAD IDEA... I'M STARTING TO AGREE WITH YOU!
NEXT ISSUE:
TO BE A JEDI!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AND NOW...THE BOUNTY HUNTERS!
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FAILING TO CRUSH THE REBELS BY ATTACKING THEIR BASE ON THE ICE PLANET, HOTH, DARTH VADER'S FLEET HOTLY PURSUES THE **MILLENNIUM FALCON.** BUT AS THE SHADOW OF THE DARK LORD THREATENS TO ENGULF PRINCESS LEIA AND THE OTHERS ABOARD, **LUKE** IS UNAWARE... GUIDED BY THE FORCE ON A MISSION OF HIS OWN, NOW, STRANGE **NEW DANGERS** LOOM... BOTH FOR HIM AND HIS FRIENDS.

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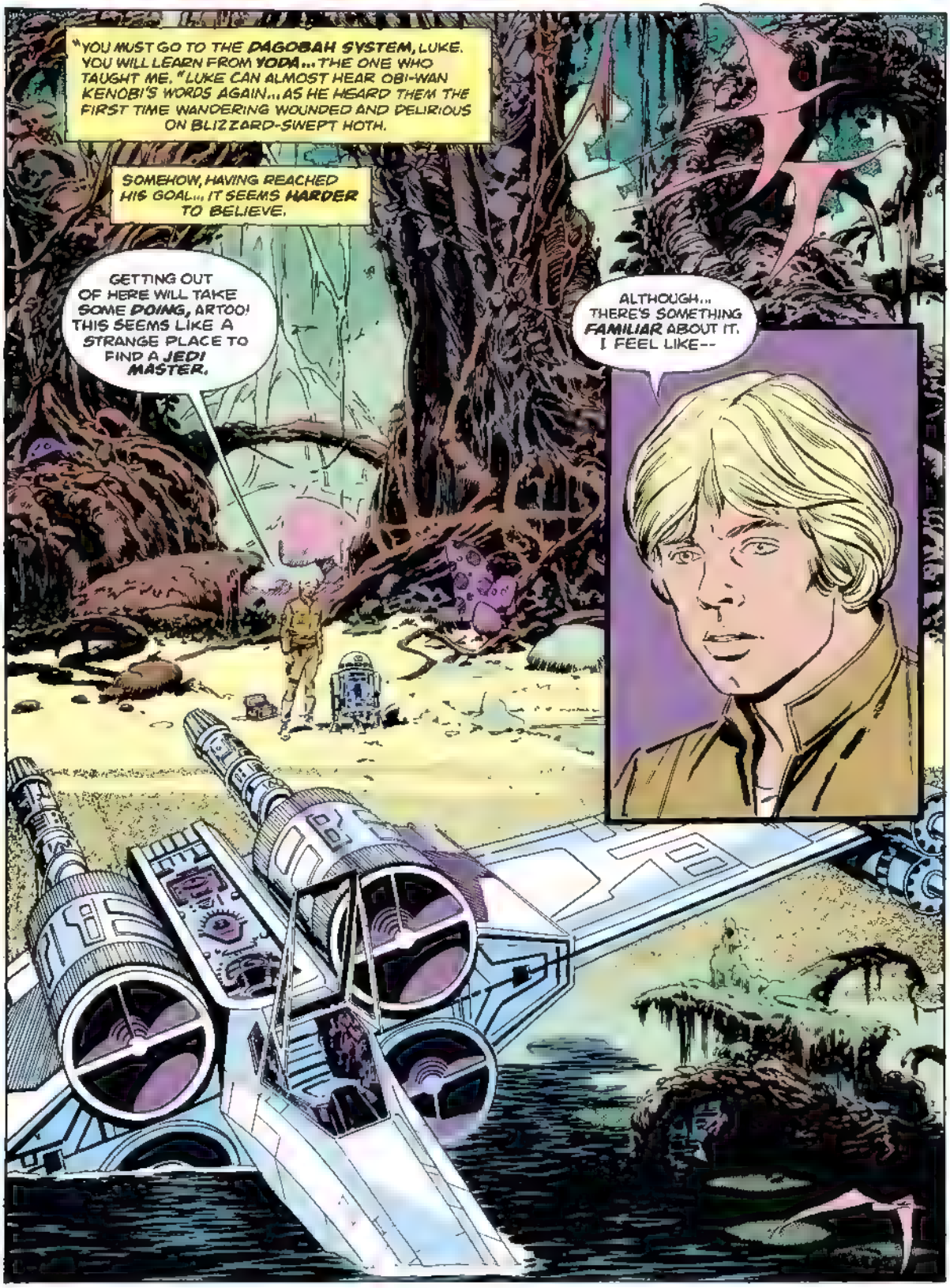
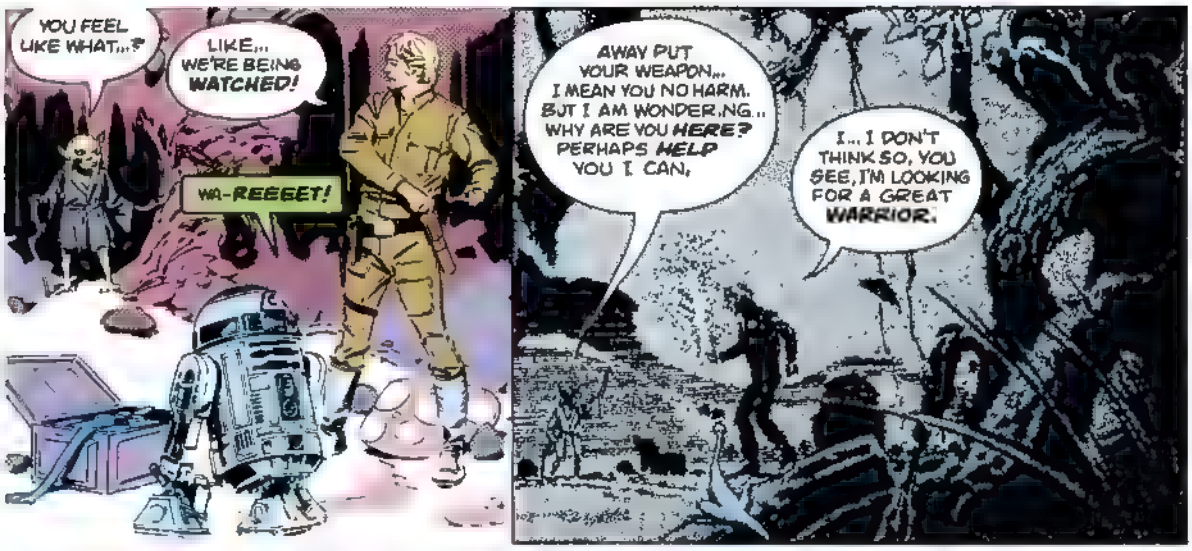
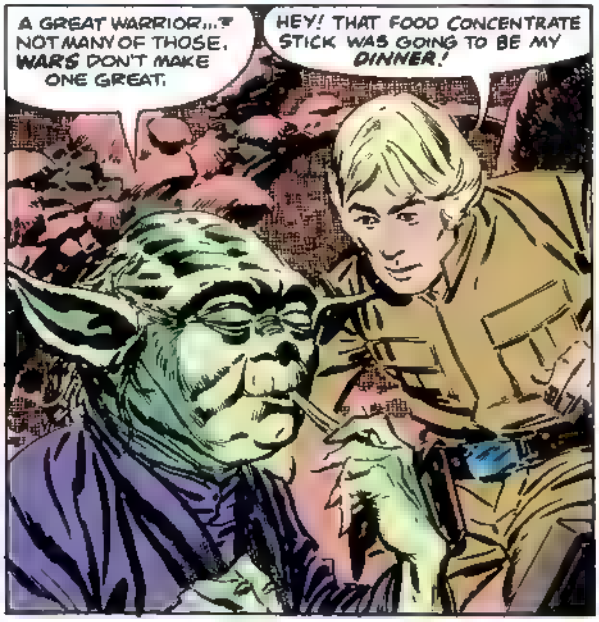
CHAPTER FOUR:

TO BE A JEDI!

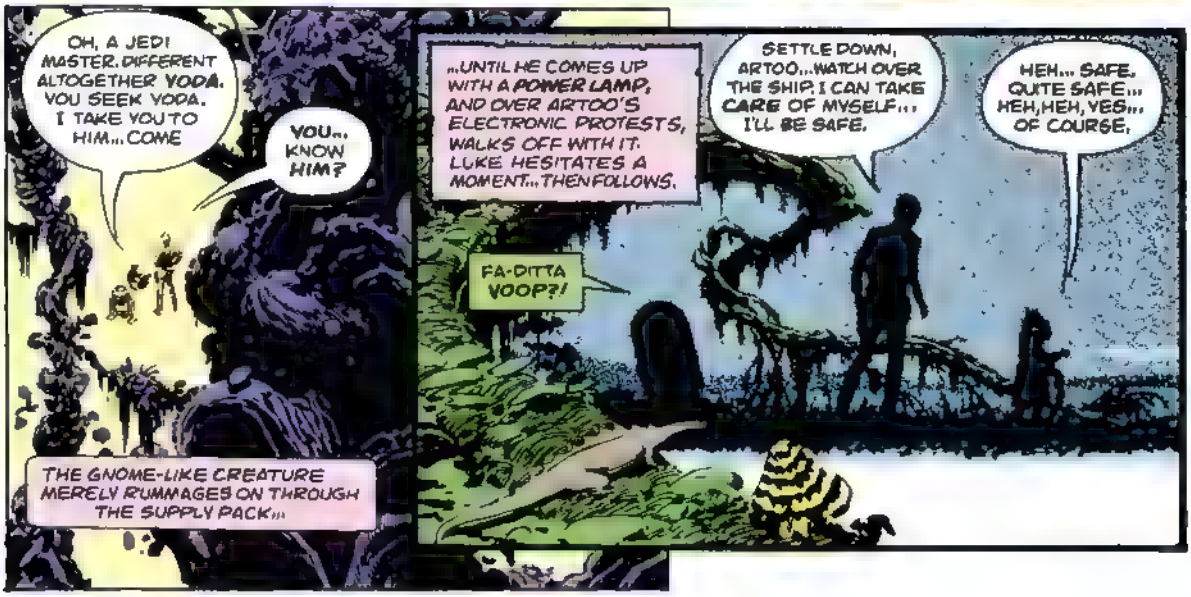

"YOU MUST GO TO THE DAGOBAH SYSTEM, LUKE. YOU WILL LEARN FROM YODA... THE ONE WHO TAUGHT ME." LUKE CAN ALMOST HEAR OBI-WAN KENOBI'S WORDS AGAIN... AS HE HEARD THEM THE FIRST TIME WANDERING WOUNDED AND DELIRIOUS ON BLIZZARD-SWEPT HOTH.
SOMEHOW, HAVING REACHED HIS GOAL... IT SEEMS HARDER TO BELIEVE.
GETTING OUT OF HERE WILL TAKE SOME DOING, ARTOO! THIS SEEMS LIKE A STRANGE PLACE TO FIND A JEDI MASTER.
ALTHOUGH... THERE'S SOMETHING FAMILIAR ABOUT IT. I FEEL LIKE--

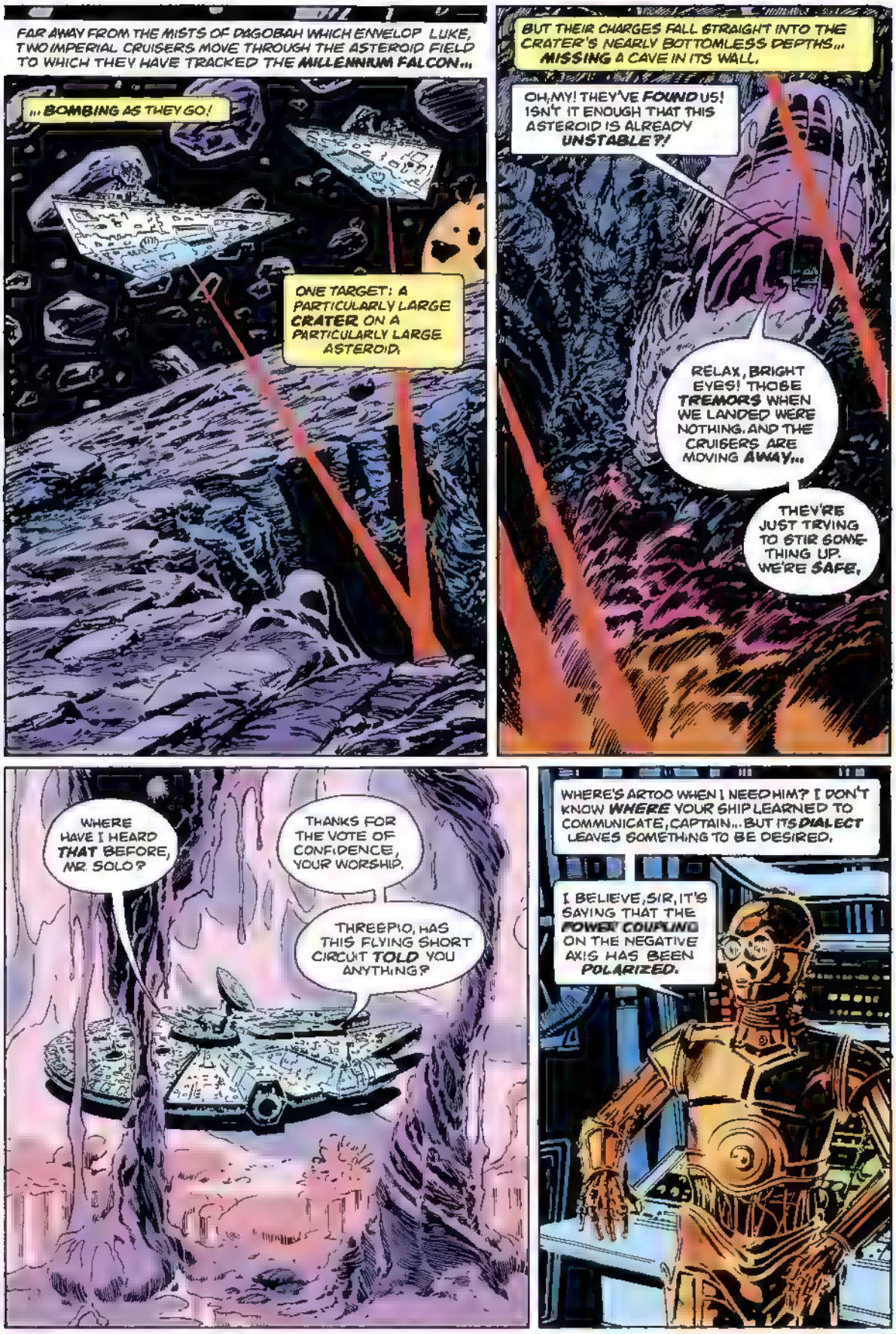

YOU FEEL LIKE WHAT...?
LIKE... WE'RE BEING WATCHED!
WA-REEEET!
AWAY PUT YOUR WEAPON... I MEAN YOU NO HARM. BUT I AM WONDERING... WHY ARE YOU HERE? PERHAPS HELP YOU I CAN.
I... I DON'T THINK SO, YOU SEE, I'M LOOKING FOR A GREAT WARRIOR.

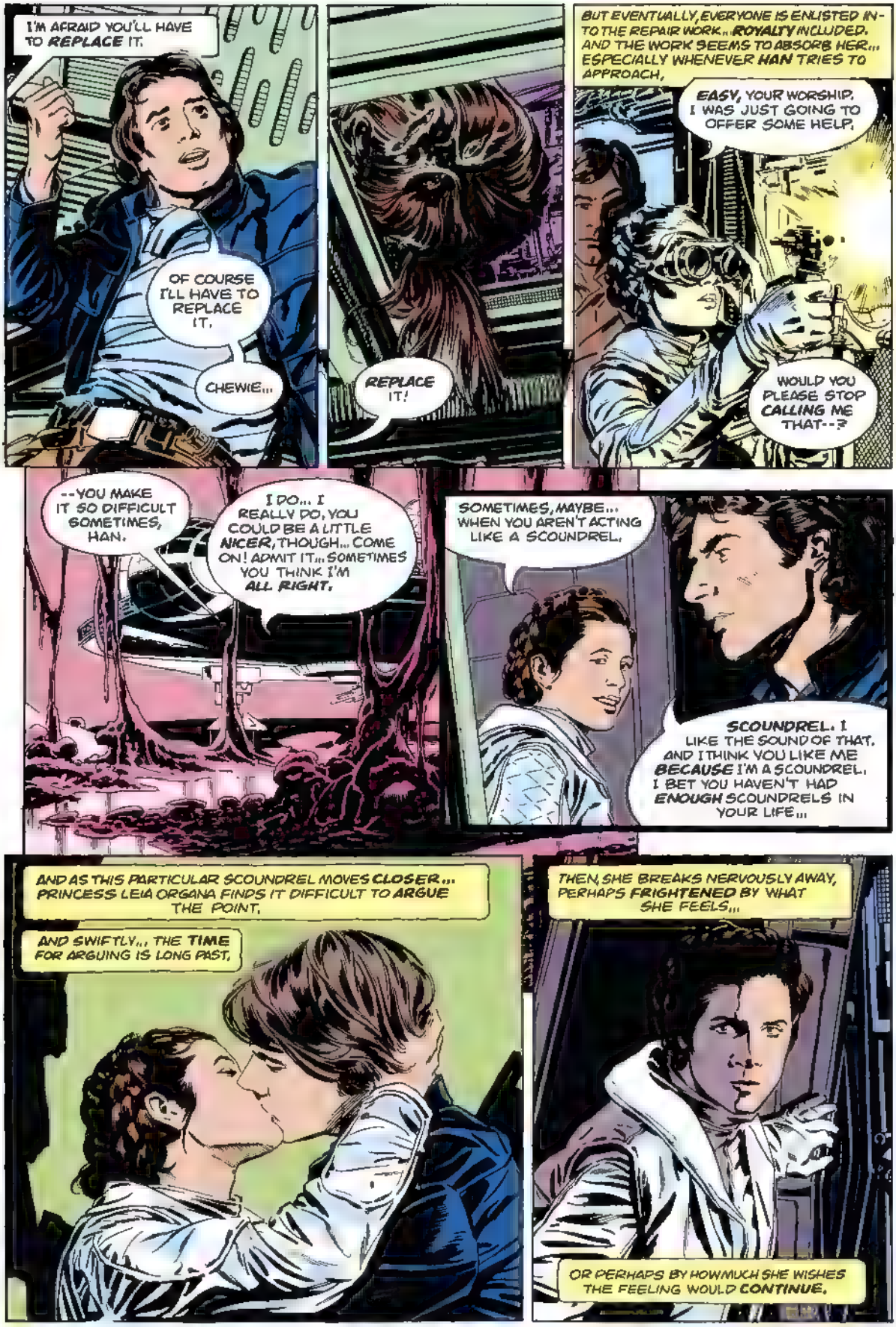


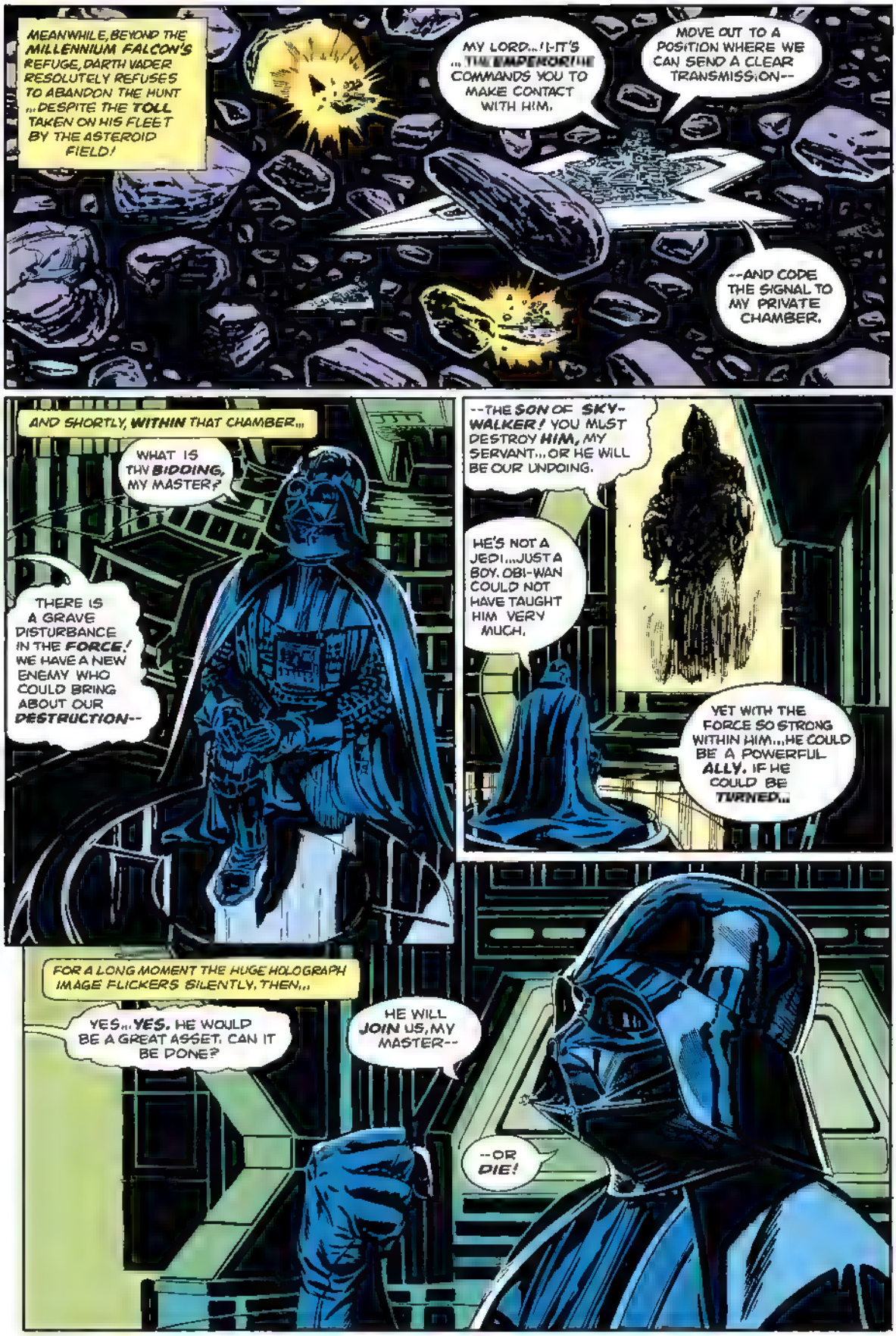
THE WIZENED LITTLE INTRUDER SEEMS UNIMPRESSED, PARTICULARLY WHEN HE STARTS TO CHEW AND PROMPTLY SPITS OUT THE BITE TAKEN.

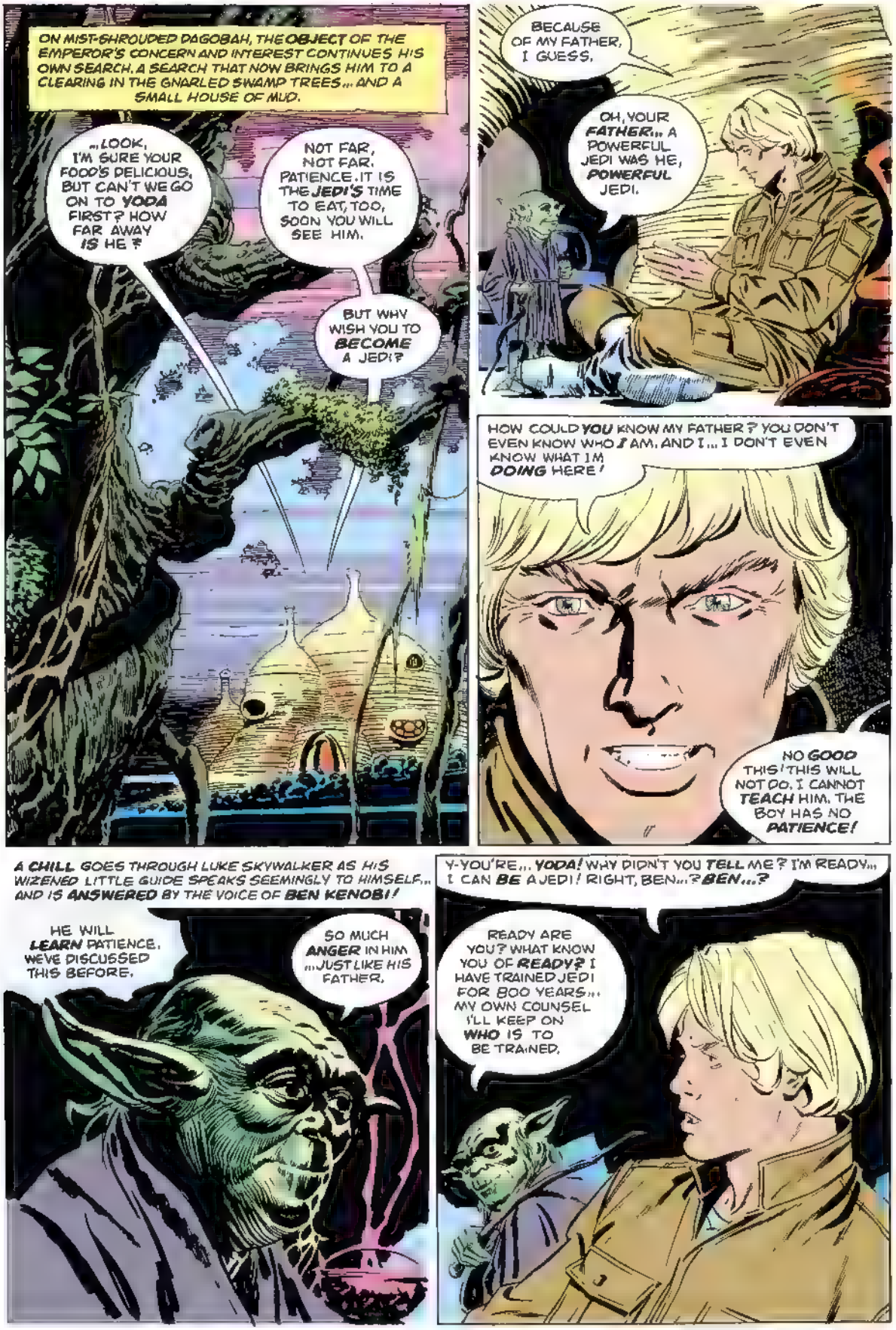
SPEEWH!? HOW YOU GET SO BIG EATING FOOD OF THIS KIND? COME, COME! I TAKE YOU TO GOOD FOOD... HELP YOU FIND YOUR FRIEND.
I'M NOT LOOKING FOR A FRIEND. I'M LOOKING FOR A JEDI MASTER.

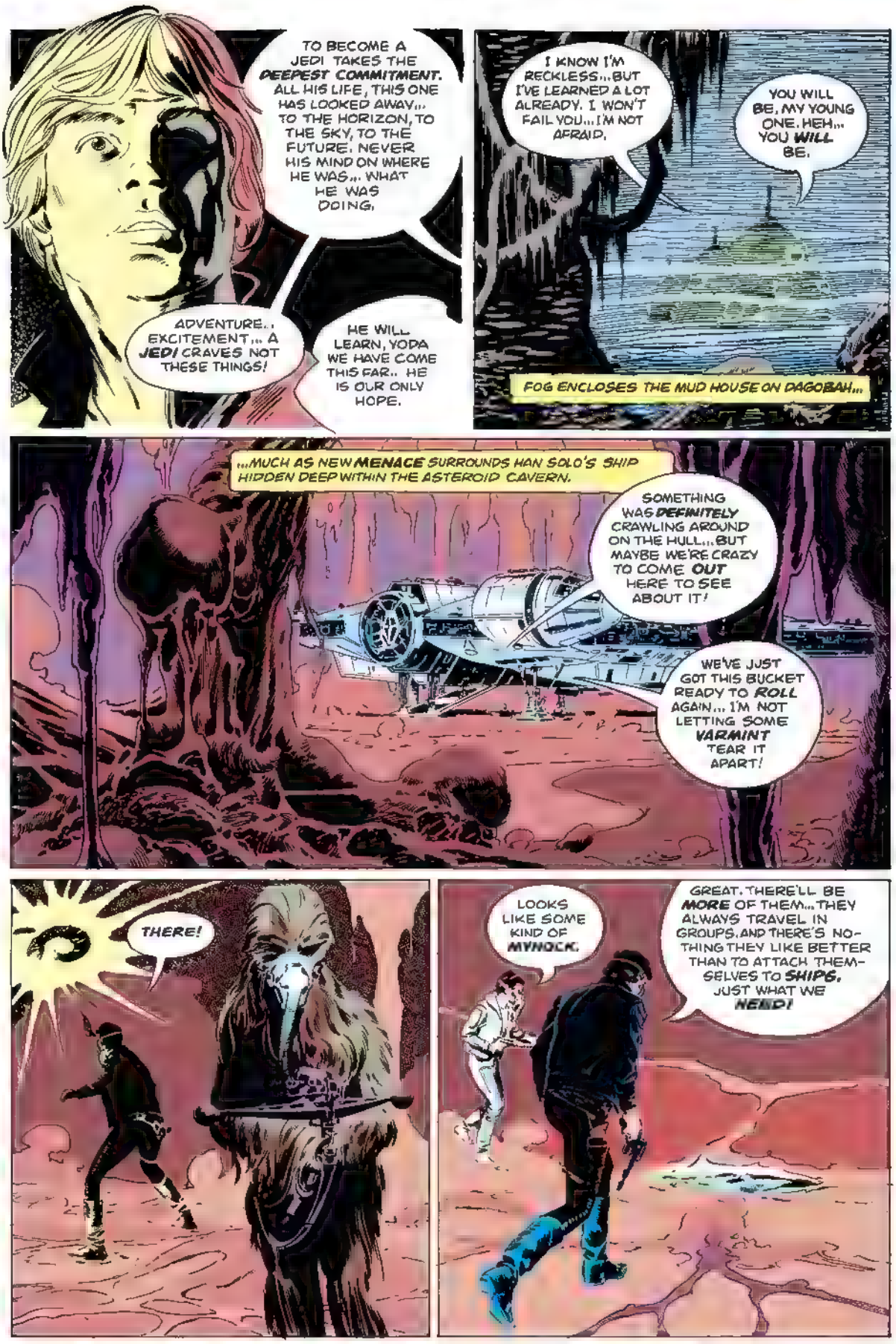

OH, A JEDI MASTER. DIFFERENT ALTOGETHER YODA. YOU SEEK YODA. I TAKE YOU TO HIM... COME
YOU... KNOW HIM?
THE GNOME-LIKE CREATURE MERELY RUMMAGES ON THROUGH THE SUPPLY PACK...
...UNTIL HE COMES UP WITH A POWER LAMP, AND OVER ARTOO'S ELECTRONIC PROTESTS, WALKS OFF WITH IT. LUKE HESITATES A MOMENT... THEN FOLLOWS.
FA-DITTA VOOP?!
SETTLE DOWN, ARTOO... WATCH OVER THE SHIP. I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF... I'LL BE SAFE.
HEH... SAFE. QUITE SAFE... HEH, HEH, YES... OF COURSE.

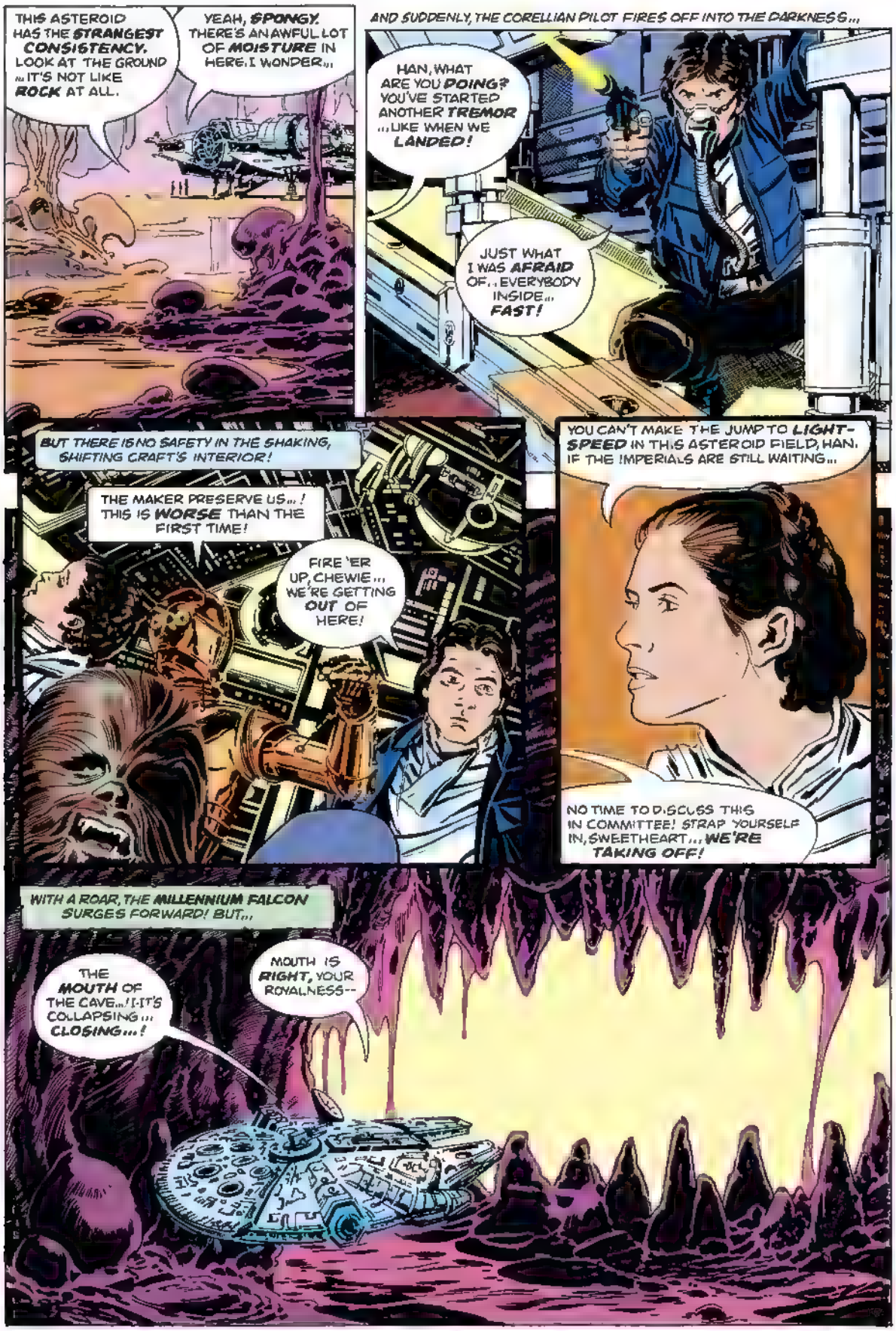

FAR AWAY FROM THE MISTS OF DAGOBAH WHICH ENVELOP LUKE, TWO IMPERIAL CRUISERS MOVE THROUGH THE ASTEROID FIELD TO WHICH THEY HAVE TRACKED THE MILLENNIUM FALCON...
...BOMBING AS THEY GO!
ONE TARGET: A PARTICULARLY LARGE CRATER ON A PARTICULARLY LARGE ASTEROID.
BUT THEIR CHARGES FALL STRAIGHT INTO THE CRATER'S NEARLY BOTTOMLESS DEPTHS... MISSING A CAVE IN ITS WALL.
OH,MY! THEY'VE FOUND US! ISN'T IT ENOUGH THAT THIS ASTEROID IS ALREADY UNSTABLE?!
RELAX, BRIGHT EYES! THOSE TREMORS WHEN WE LANDED WERE NOTHING. AND THE CRUISERS ARE MOVING AWAY...
THEY'RE JUST TRYING TO STIR SOMETHING UP. WE'RE SAFE.
WHERE HAVE I HEARD THAT BEFORE, MR. SOLO?
THANKS FOR THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, YOUR WORSHIP.
THREEPIO, HAS THIS FLYING SHORT CIRCUIT TOLD YOU ANYTHING?
WHERE'S ARTOO WHEN I NEED HIM? I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOUR SHIP LEARNED TO COMMUNICATE, CAPTAIN... BUT ITS DIALECT LEAVES SOMETHING TO BE DESIRED.
I BELIEVE, SIR, IT'S SAYING THAT THE POWER COUPLING ON THE NEGATIVE AXIS HAS BEEN POLARIZED.

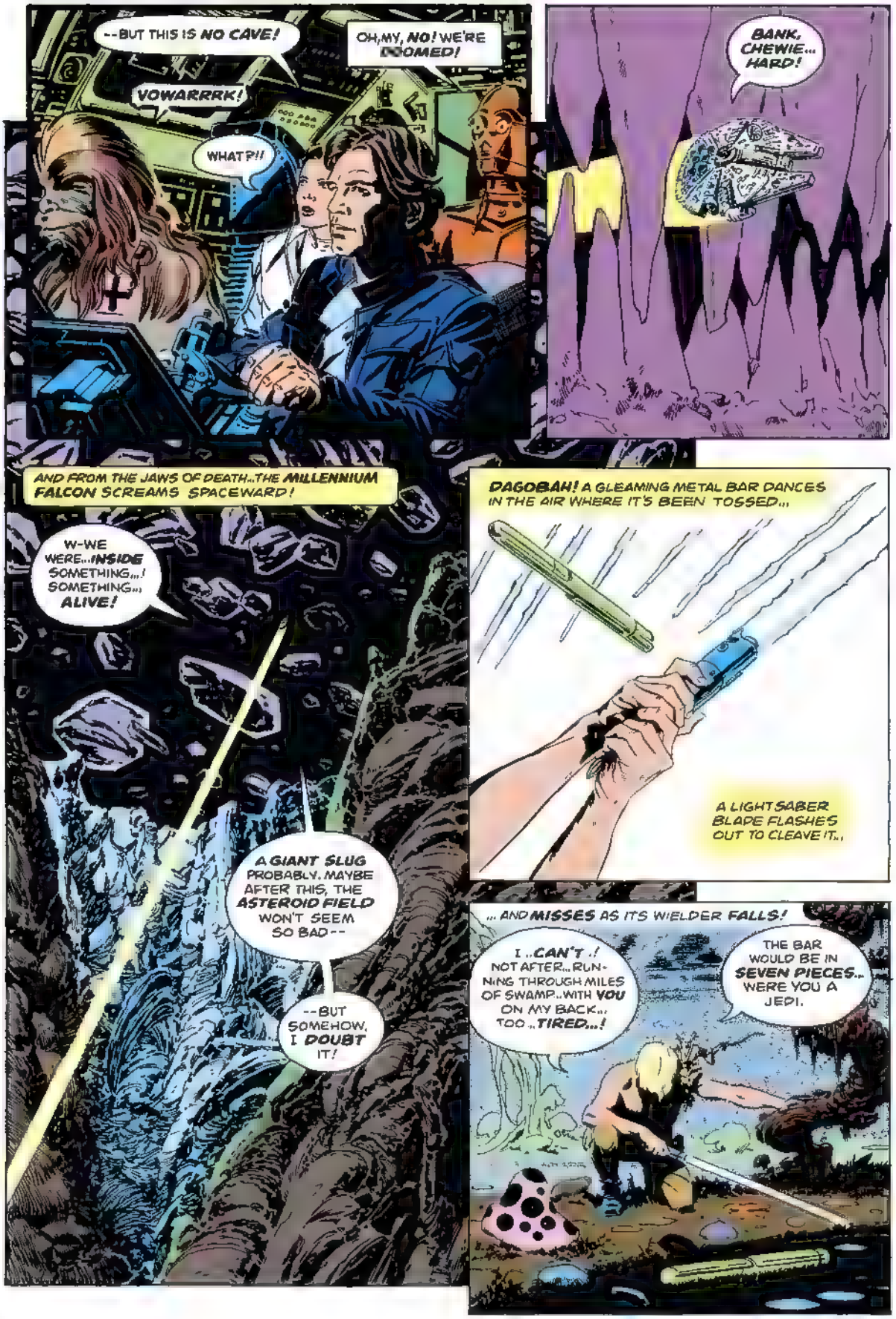

I'M AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO REPLACE IT.
OF COURSE I'LL HAVE TO REPLACE IT.
CHEWIE...
REPLACE IT!
BUT EVENTUALLY, EVERYONE IS ENLISTED INTO THE REPAIR WORK... ROYALTY INCLUDED. AND THE WORK SEEMS TO ABSORB HER... ESPECIALLY WHENEVER HAN TRIES TO APPROACH,
EASY, YOUR WORSHIP. I WAS JUST GOING TO OFFER SOME HELP.
WOULD YOU PLEASE STOP CALLING ME THAT--?
--YOU MAKE IT SO DIFFICULT SOMETIMES, HAN.
I DO... I REALLY DO, YOU COULD BE A LITTLE NICER, THOUGH... COME ON! ADMIT IT... SOMETIMES YOU THINK I'M ALL RIGHT.
SOMETIMES, MAYBE... WHEN YOU AREN'T ACTING LIKE A SCOUNDREL.
SCOUNDREL. I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT. AND I THINK YOU LIKE ME BECAUSE I'M A SCOUNDREL. I BET YOU HAVEN'T HAD ENOUGH SCOUNDRELS IN YOUR LIFE...
AND AS THIS PARTICULAR SCOUNDREL MOVES CLOSER... PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO ARGUE THE POINT.
AND SWIFTLY... THE TIME FOR ARGUING IS LONG PAST.
THEN, SHE BREAKS NERVOUSLY AWAY, PERHAPS FRIGHTENED BY WHAT SHE FEELS...
OR PERHAPS BY HOW MUCH SHE WISHES THE FEELING WOULD CONTINUE.


MEANWHILE, BEYOND THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S REFUGE, DARTH VADER RESOLUTELY REFUSES TO ABANDON THE HUNT ...DESPITE THE TOLL TAKEN ON HIS FLEET BY THE ASTEROID FIELD!
MY LORD...! I-IT'S ...THE EMPEROR! HE COMMANDS YOU TO MAKE CONTACT WITH HIM.
MOVE OUT TO A POSITION WHERE WE CAN SEND A CLEAR TRANSMISSION--
--AND CODE THE SIGNAL TO MY PRIVATE CHAMBER.
AND SHORTLY, WITHIN THAT CHAMBER...
WHAT IS THY BIDDING, MY MASTER?
THERE IS A GRAVE DISTURBANCE IN THE FORCE! WE HAVE A NEW ENEMY WHO COULD BRING ABOUT OUR DESTRUCTION--
--THE SON OF SKYWALKER! YOU MUST DESTROY HIM, MY SERVANT... OR HE WILL BE OUR UNDOING.
HE'S NOT A JEDI... JUST A BOY. OBI-WAN COULD NOT HAVE TAUGHT HIM VERY MUCH.
YET WITH THE FORCE SO STRONG WITHIN HIM... HE COULD BE A POWERFUL ALLY. IF HE COULD BE TURNED...
FOR A LONG MOMENT THE HUGE HOLOGRAPH IMAGE FLICKERS SILENTLY, THEN...
YES... YES. HE WOULD BE A GREAT ASSET. CAN IT BE DONE?
HE WILL JOIN US, MY MASTER--
--OR DIE!

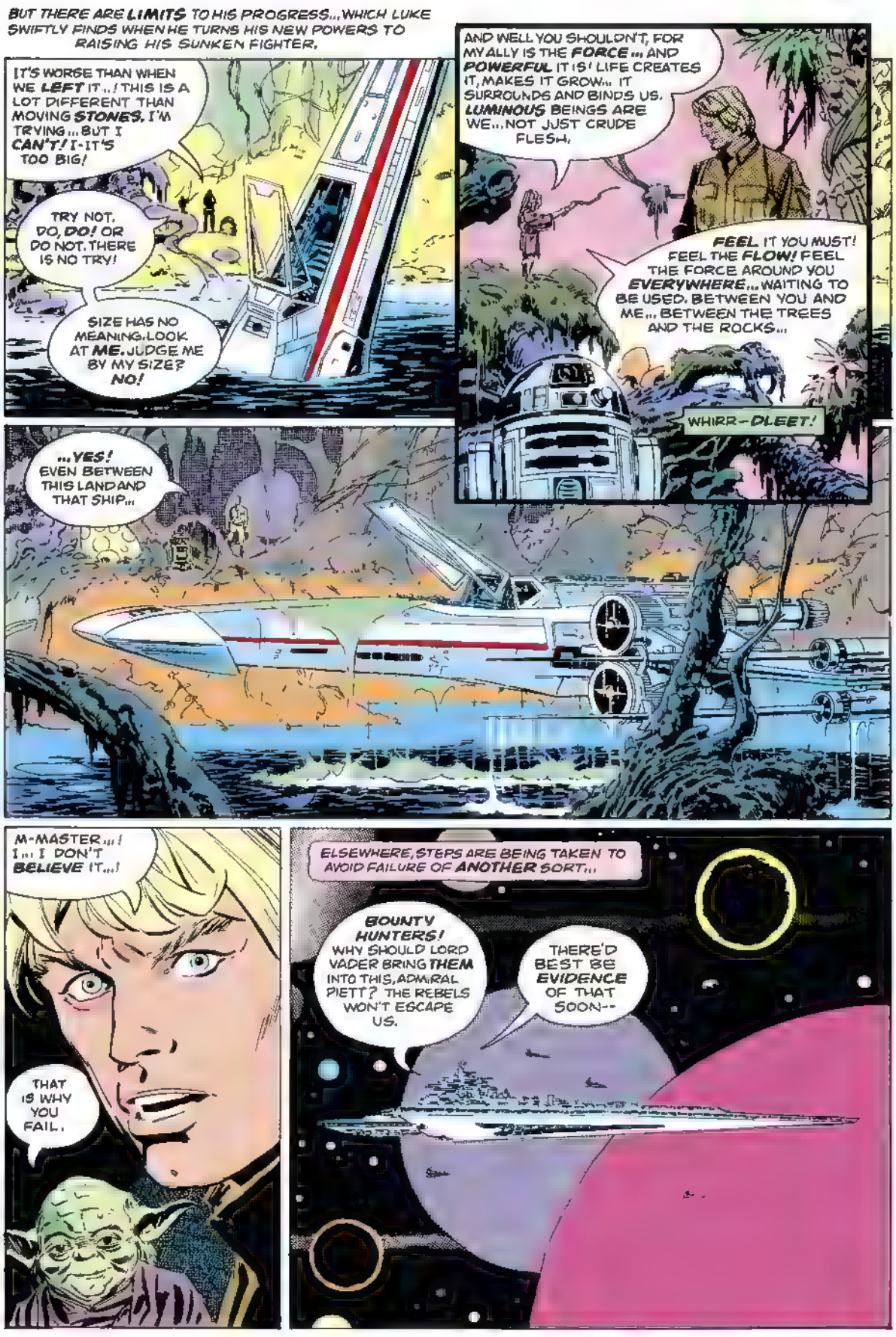

ON MIST-SHROUDED DAGOBAH, THE OBJECT OF THE EMPEROR'S CONCERN AND INTEREST CONTINUES HIS OWN SEARCH. A SEARCH THAT NOW BRINGS HIM TO A CLEARING IN THE GNARLED SWAMP TREES... AND A SMALL HOUSE OF MUD.
...LOOK, I'M SURE YOUR FOOD'S DELICIOUS, BUT CAN'T WE GO ON TO YODA FIRST? HOW FAR AWAY IS HE?
NOT FAR, NOT FAR. PATIENCE. IT IS THE JEDI'S TIME TO EAT, TOO, SOON YOU WILL SEE HIM.
BUT WHY WISH YOU TO BECOME A JEDI?
BECAUSE OF MY FATHER, I GUESS.
OH, YOUR FATHER... A POWERFUL JEDI WAS HE, POWERFUL JEDI.
HOW COULD YOU KNOW MY FATHER? YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHO I AM. AND I... I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I'M DOING HERE!
NO GOOD THIS! THIS WILL NOT DO. I CANNOT TEACH HIM. THE BOY HAS NO PATIENCE!
A CHILL GOES THROUGH LUKE SKYWALKER AS HIS WIZENED LITTLE GUIDE SPEAKS SEEMINGLY TO HIMSELF... AND IS ANSWERED BY THE VOICE OF BEN KENOBI!
HE WILL LEARN PATIENCE. WE'VE DISCUSSED THIS BEFORE.
SO MUCH ANGER IN HIM ...JUST LIKE HIS FATHER.
Y-YOU'RE... YODA! WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME? I'M READY... I CAN BE A JEDI! RIGHT, BEN...? BEN...?
READY ARE YOU? WHAT KNOW YOU OF READY? I HAVE TRAINED JEDI FOR 800 YEARS... MY OWN COUNSEL I'LL KEEP ON WHO IS TO BE TRAINED.


TO BECOME A JEDI TAKES THE DEEPEST COMMITMENT. ALL HIS LIFE, THIS ONE HAS LOOKED AWAY... TO THE HORIZON, TO THE SKY, TO THE FUTURE. NEVER HIS MIND ON WHERE HE WAS... WHAT HE WAS DOING.
ADVENTURE... EXCITEMENT... A JEDI CRAVES NOT THESE THINGS!
HE WILL LEARN, YODA WE HAVE COME THIS FAR.. HE IS OUR ONLY HOPE.
I KNOW I'M RECKLESS... BUT I'VE LEARNED A LOT ALREADY. I WON'T FAIL YOU... I'M NOT AFRAID.
YOU WILL BE, MY YOUNG ONE. HEH... YOU WILL BE.
FOG ENCLOSES THE MUD HOUSE ON DAGOBAH...
...MUCH AS NEW MENACE SURROUNDS HAN SOLO'S SHIP HIDDEN DEEP WITHIN THE ASTEROID CAVERN.
SOMETHING WAS DEFINITELY CRAWLING AROUND ON THE HULL... BUT MAYBE WE'RE CRAZY TO COME OUT HERE TO SEE ABOUT IT!
WE'VE JUST GOT THIS BUCKET READY TO ROLL AGAIN... I'M NOT LETTING SOME VARMINT TEAR IT APART!
THERE!
LOOKS LIKE SOME KIND OF MYNOCK.
GREAT. THERE'LL BE MORE OF THEM... THEY ALWAYS TRAVEL IN GROUPS, AND THERE'S NOTHING THEY LIKE BETTER THAN TO ATTACH THEMSELVES TO SHIPS. JUST WHAT WE NEED!


THIS ASTEROID HAS THE STRANGEST CONSISTENCY. LOOK AT THE GROUND ... IT'S NOT LIKE ROCK AT ALL.
YEAH, SPONGY. THERE'S AN AWFUL LOT OF MOISTURE IN HERE. I WONDER...
AND SUDDENLY, THE CORELLIAN PILOT FIRES OFF INTO THE DARKNESS...
HAN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? YOU'VE STARTED ANOTHER TREMOR ...LIKE WHEN WE LANDED!
JUST WHAT I WAS AFRAID OF... EVERYBODY INSIDE... FAST!
BUT THERE IS NO SAFETY IN THE SHAKING, SHIFTING CRAFT'S INTERIOR!
THE MAKER PRESERVE US...! THIS IS WORSE THAN THE FIRST TIME!
FIRE 'ER UP, CHEWIE... WE'RE GETTING OUT OF HERE!
YOU CAN'T MAKE THE JUMP TO LIGHT-SPEED IN THIS ASTEROID FIELD, HAN. IF THE IMPERIALS ARE STILL WAITING...
NO TIME TO DISCUSS THIS IN COMMITTEE! STRAP YOURSELF IN, SWEETHEART... WE'RE TAKING OFF!
WITH A ROAR, THE MILLENNIUM FALCON SURGES FORWARD! BUT...
THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE...! IT'S COLLAPSING... CLOSING...!
MOUTH IS RIGHT, YOUR ROYALNESS--

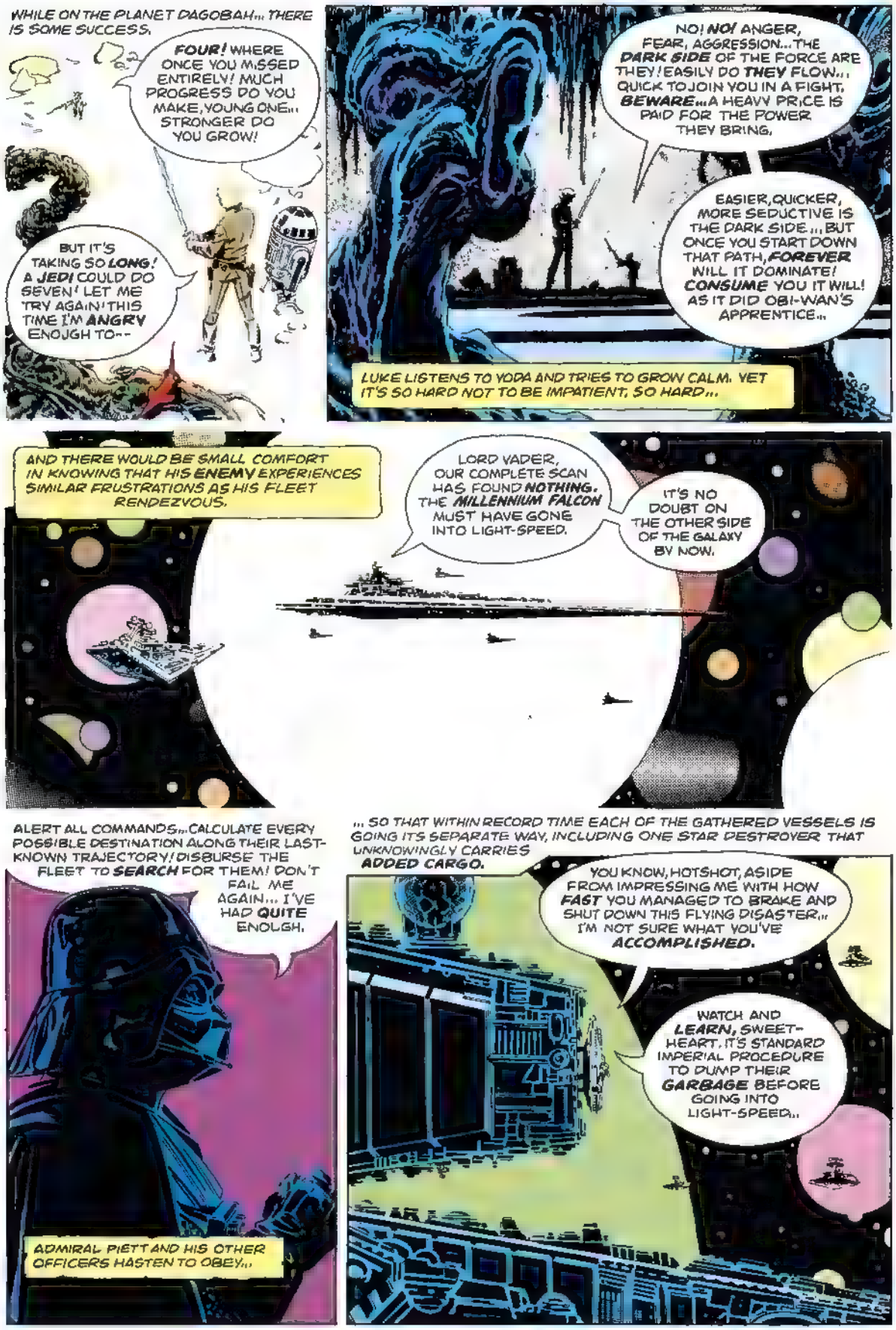

--BUT THIS IS NO CAVE!
OH, MY, NO! WE'RE DOOMED!
VOWARRRK!
WHAT?!!
BANK, CHEWIE... HARD!
AND FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH..THE MILLENNIUM FALCON SCREAMS SPACEWARD!
W-WE WERE...INSIDE SOMETHING...! SOMETHING... ALIVE!
A GIANT SLUG PROBABLY. MAYBE AFTER THIS, THE ASTEROID FIELD WON'T SEEM SO BAD--
--BUT SOMEHOW, I DOUBT IT!
DAGOBAH! A GLEAMING METAL BAR DANCES IN THE AIR WHERE IT'S BEEN TOSSED...
A LIGHTSABER BLADE FLASHES OUT TO CLEAVE IT...
...AND MISSES AS ITS WIELDER FALLS!
I ..CAN'T .! NOT AFTER...RUNNING THROUGH MILES OF SWAMP..WITH YOU ON MY BACK... TOO ..TIRED...!
THE BAR WOULD BE IN SEVEN PIECES.. WERE YOU A JEDI.

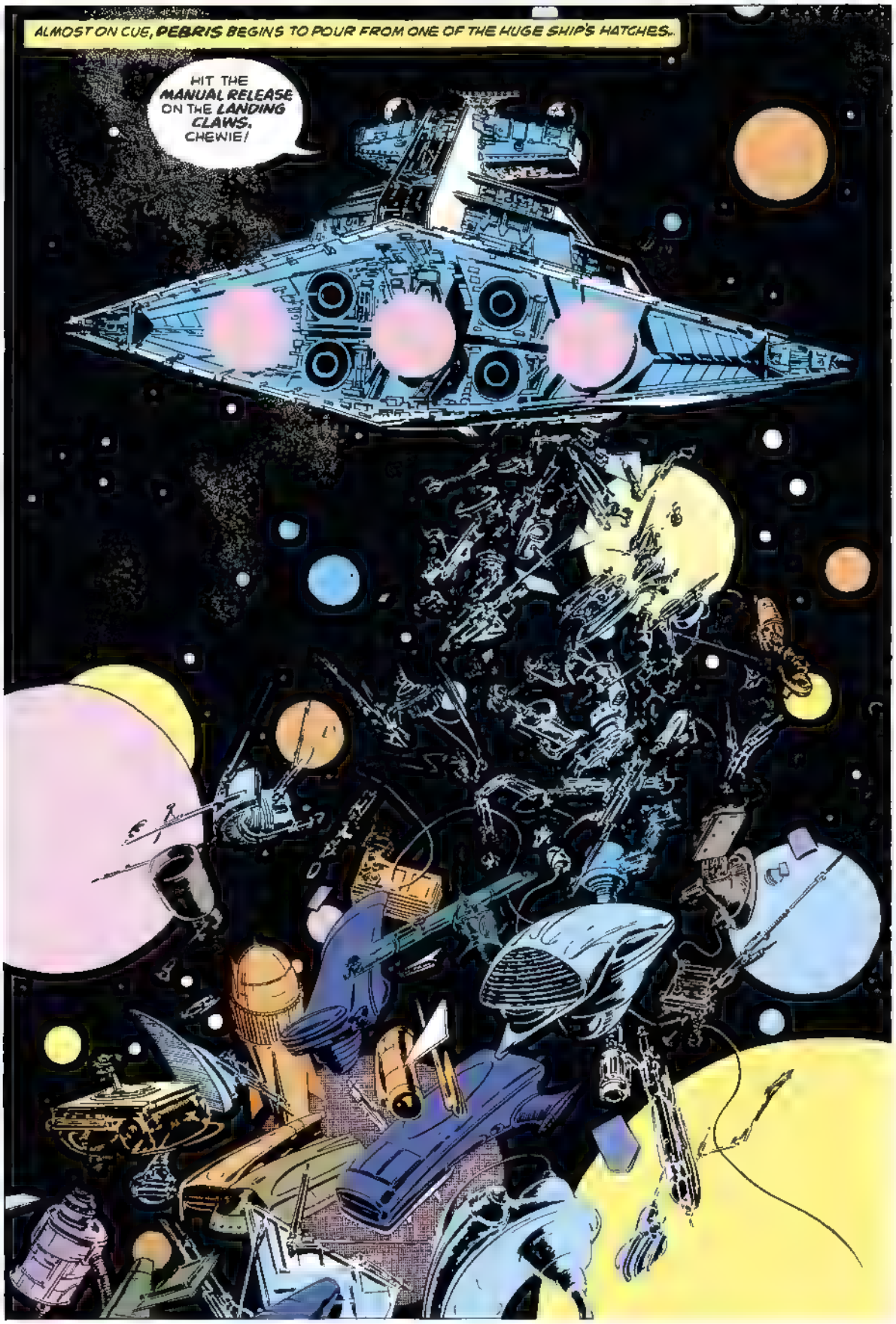
I.. I THOUGHT... I WAS IN.. GOOD SHAPE...!
YES, BUT BY WHAT STANDARD ASK I ? FORGET YOUR OLD MEASURES--
--UNLEARN. HEH. UNLEARN!
AND AS TIME PASSES, LUKE DOES THAT AND MORE. MUCH MORE. PUSHED BY THE UN-YIELDING LITTLE JEDI MASTER TO CONCEN-TRATE, TO OPEN HIMSELF TO THE FORCE... THE YOUNG MAN FROM TATOOINE BEGINS TO GROW IN WAYS HE NEVER DREAMED POSSIBLE.


BUT THERE ARE LIMITS TO HIS PROGRESS... WHICH LUKE SWIFTLY FINDS WHEN HE TURNS HIS NEW POWERS TO RAISING HIS SUNKEN FIGHTER.
IT'S WORSE THAN WHEN WE LEFT IT...! THIS IS A LOT DIFFERENT THAN MOVING STONES. I'M TRYING... BUT I CAN'T! I-IT'S TOO BIG!
TRY NOT. DO, DO! OR DO NOT. THERE IS NO TRY!
SIZE HAS NO MEANING. LOOK AT ME. JUDGE ME BY MY SIZE? NO!
AND WELL YOU SHOULDN'T, FOR MY ALLY IS THE FORCE... AND POWERFUL IT IS! LIFE CREATES IT, MAKES IT GROW... IT SURROUNDS AND BINDS US. LUMINOUS BEINGS ARE WE... NOT JUST CRUDE FLESH.
FEEL IT YOU MUST! FEEL THE FLOW! FEEL THE FORCE AROUND YOU EVERYWHERE... WAITING TO BE USED. BETWEEN YOU AND ME... BETWEEN THE TREES AND THE ROCKS...
WHIRR-DLEET!
...YES! EVEN BETWEEN THIS LAND AND THAT SHIP...
M-MASTER...! I... I DON'T BELIEVE IT...!
THAT IS WHY YOU FAIL.
ELSEWHERE, STEPS ARE BEING TAKEN TO AVOID FAILURE OF ANOTHER SORT...
BOUNTY HUNTERS! WHY SHOULD LORD VADER BRING THEM INTO THIS, ADMIRAL PIETT? THE REBELS WON'T ESCAPE US.
THERE'D BEST BE EVIDENCE OF THAT SOON--

"HE'S ALREADY MAKING ARRANGEMENTS WITH THAT RABBLE ON THE BRIDGE!"
...THERE WILL BE A SUBSTANTIAL REWARD FOR THE ONE WHO FINDS THE MILLENNIUM FALCON. YOU AND YOUR BAND ARE HIGHLY REGARDED IN YOUR PARTICULAR TRADE, BOBA FETT... DO NOT DISAPPOINT ME.
GIVEN A FREE HAND, I'VE NEVER DISAPPOINTED ANYONE... EXCEPT THOSE WHO HOPED TO ESCAPE ME.
YOU ARE FREE TO USE ANY METHOD NECESSARY. BUT I WANT PROOF... NO DISINTEGRATIONS.
UNDERSTOOD. NOW ABOUT THE REWARD...JUST HOW SUBSTANTIAL WILL IT--
BUT THE CLATTER OF FOOTSTEPS INTERRUPTS THE COLD-VOICED MERCENARY, AND MAKES DARTH VADER WHIRL...
MY LORD..! WE HAVE THEM!
AND SOMEWHERE AHEAD OF THE DARK LORD'S GIGANTIC CRUISER...
THIS ISN'T FAIR! I'M SURE EVERYTHING CHECKED OUT!
DON'T TELL ME, FLYBOY, LET ME GUESS... STILL NO LIGHT-SPEED?
CAPTAIN, WE'VE LOST THE REAR DEFLECTOR SHIELD...ANOTHER DIRECT HIT ON THE BACK QUARTER AND WE'RE DONE FOR!

FOR AN INSTANT THE CORELLIAN PILOT IS SILENT, THOUGHTFUL. THEN...
ALL RIGHT, CHEWIE! SWING THIS BUCKET AROUND ... FULL POWER ON THE FRONT SHIELD!
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO ATTACK THEM?!
SIR, IF I MIGHT POINT OUT, THE ODDS OF SURVIVING A DIRECT ASSAULT ON AN IMPERIAL STAR DESTROYER ARE --
A CURT GROWL FROM THE SHIP'S WOOKIEE FIRST MATE INDUCES SEE-THREEPIO TO KEEP HIS ODDS TO HIMSELF...
...AS THE TINY FREIGHTER SCREAMS LOW ACROSS THE IMPERIAL WARSHIP'S HULL WITH SEEMINGLY SUICIDAL INTENT!
WE'RE GOING TO COLLIDE!
SHIELDS UP... HE'S INSANE!
LOOK OUT!
THEN SUDDENLY...
CAPTAIN...! I-IT'S GONE! DOESN'T APPEAR ON ANY OF OUR TRACKING SCOPES. PERHAPS THEY WENT INTO LIGHT-SPEED AT THE LAST INSTANT...
THEN WHY DID THEY ATTACK? THEY COULD HAVE GONE INTO HYPERSPACE AS SOON AS THEY CLEARED THE ASTEROID FIELD! THERE'S GOT TO BE A MORE LOGICAL EXPLANATION, BUT--
SIR, LORD VADER DEMANDS AN UPDATE ON OUR PURSUIT, SIR...? SIR...?
WITH THE RESIGNED AIR OF A MAN TOTALLY WITHOUT HOPE... THE CRUISER COMMANDER MOVES TO REPORT HIS FAILURE.


WHILE ON THE PLANET DAGOBAH... THERE IS SOME SUCCESS.
FOUR! WHERE ONCE YOU MISSED ENTIRELY! MUCH PROGRESS DO YOU MAKE, YOUNG ONE... STRONGER DO YOU GROW!
BUT IT'S TAKING SO LONG! A JEDI COULD DO SEVEN! LET ME TRY AGAIN! THIS TIME I'M ANGRY ENOUGH TO--
NO! NO! ANGER, FEAR, AGGRESSION... THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE ARE THEY! EASILY DO THEY FLOW... QUICK TO JOIN YOU IN A FIGHT. BEWARE... A HEAVY PRICE IS PAID FOR THE POWER THEY BRING.
EASIER, QUICKER, MORE SEDUCTIVE IS THE DARK SIDE... BUT ONCE YOU START DOWN THAT PATH, FOREVER WILL IT DOMINATE! CONSUME YOU IT WILL! AS IT DID OBI-WAN'S APPRENTICE...
LUKE LISTENS TO YODA AND TRIES TO GROW CALM. YET IT'S SO HARD NOT TO BE IMPATIENT, SO HARD...
AND THERE WOULD BE SMALL COMFORT IN KNOWING THAT HIS ENEMY EXPERIENCES SIMILAR FRUSTRATIONS AS HIS FLEET RENDEZVOUS.
LORD VADER, OUR COMPLETE SCAN HAS FOUND NOTHING. THE MILLENNIUM FALCON MUST HAVE GONE INTO LIGHT-SPEED.
IT'S NO DOUBT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GALAXY BY NOW.
ALERT ALL COMMANDS... CALCULATE EVERY POSSIBLE DESTINATION ALONG THEIR LAST-KNOWN TRAJECTORY! DISBURSE THE FLEET TO SEARCH FOR THEM! DON'T FAIL ME AGAIN... I'VE HAD QUITE ENOUGH.
ADMIRAL PIETT AND HIS OTHER OFFICERS HASTEN TO OBEY...
... SO THAT WITHIN RECORD TIME EACH OF THE GATHERED VESSELS IS GOING ITS SEPARATE WAY, INCLUDING ONE STAR DESTROYER THAT UNKNOWINGLY CARRIES ADDED CARGO.
YOU KNOW, HOTSHOT, ASIDE FROM IMPRESSING ME WITH HOW FAST YOU MANAGED TO BRAKE AND SHUT DOWN THIS FLYING DISASTER... I'M NOT SURE WHAT YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED.
WATCH AND LEARN, SWEETHEART. IT'S STANDARD IMPERIAL PROCEDURE TO DUMP THEIR GARBAGE BEFORE GOING INTO LIGHT-SPEED...


ALMOST ON CUE, DEBRIS BEGINS TO POUR FROM ONE OF THE HUGE SHIP'S HATCHES..
HIT THE MANUAL RELEASE ON THE LANDING CLAWS, CHEWIE!

AND WHEN THE STREAM OF SPENT GENERATORS, UNSALVAGEABLE PARTS, AND OTHER ACCUMULATED JUNK IS JETTISONED,..THE MILLENNIUM FALCON ARTFULLY DRIFTS AWAY WITH IT!
NOT BAD, FLYBOY! YOU DO HAVE YOUR MOMENTS,,, NOT MANY, BUT YOU DO HAVE THEM.
NOW WHAT?
LEMME CHECK THE COMPUTER LOG,,, AHA! THE BESPIN SYSTEM. IT'S A FAIR DISTANCE,,, BUT MANAGEABLE. I KNOW A FELLA THERE,,,
LANDO CALRISSIAN. GAMBLER CON ARTIST, ALL-AROUND SCOUNDREL ,,, YOUR KIND OF GUY, PRINCESS.
CAN YOU TRUST HIM, HAN?
OF COURSE NOT BUT LANDO AND I GO WAY BACK,, BELIEVE ME, HE HAS NO LOVE FOR THE EMPIRE.
YET AS THE MILLENNIUM FALCON MOVES TOWARD SAFETY, THE SAME FLOATING DEBRIS WHICH MASKS IT FROM THE DEPARTING IMPERIALS HIDES A SECOND SHIP FROM VIEW. A SHIP WHICH FOLLOWS THE FALCON.
IT IS CALLED THE SLAVE 1. IT IS OWNED BY THE BOUNTY HUNTER NAMED BOBA FETT.
NEXT ISSUE
BETRAYAL AT BESPIN!

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STAR WARS
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
BETRAYAL AT BESPIN!

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STAR WARS™ THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

ON THE PLANET **DAGOBAH**, LUKE SKYWALKER IS IN TRAINING TO BECOME A **JEDI** UNDER THE INSTRUCTION OF THE CENTURIES-OLD MASTER, **YODA**. BUT EVEN AS THE YOUNG WARRIOR FROM TATOOINE'S POWER AND ABILITY GROW DAILY... DARTH VADER, NOW ENLISTING THE SKILLS OF THE BOUNTY HUNTER, **BOBA FETT**, CONTINUES TO HOUND LUKE'S FRIENDS IN THE **MILLENNIUM FALCON**...

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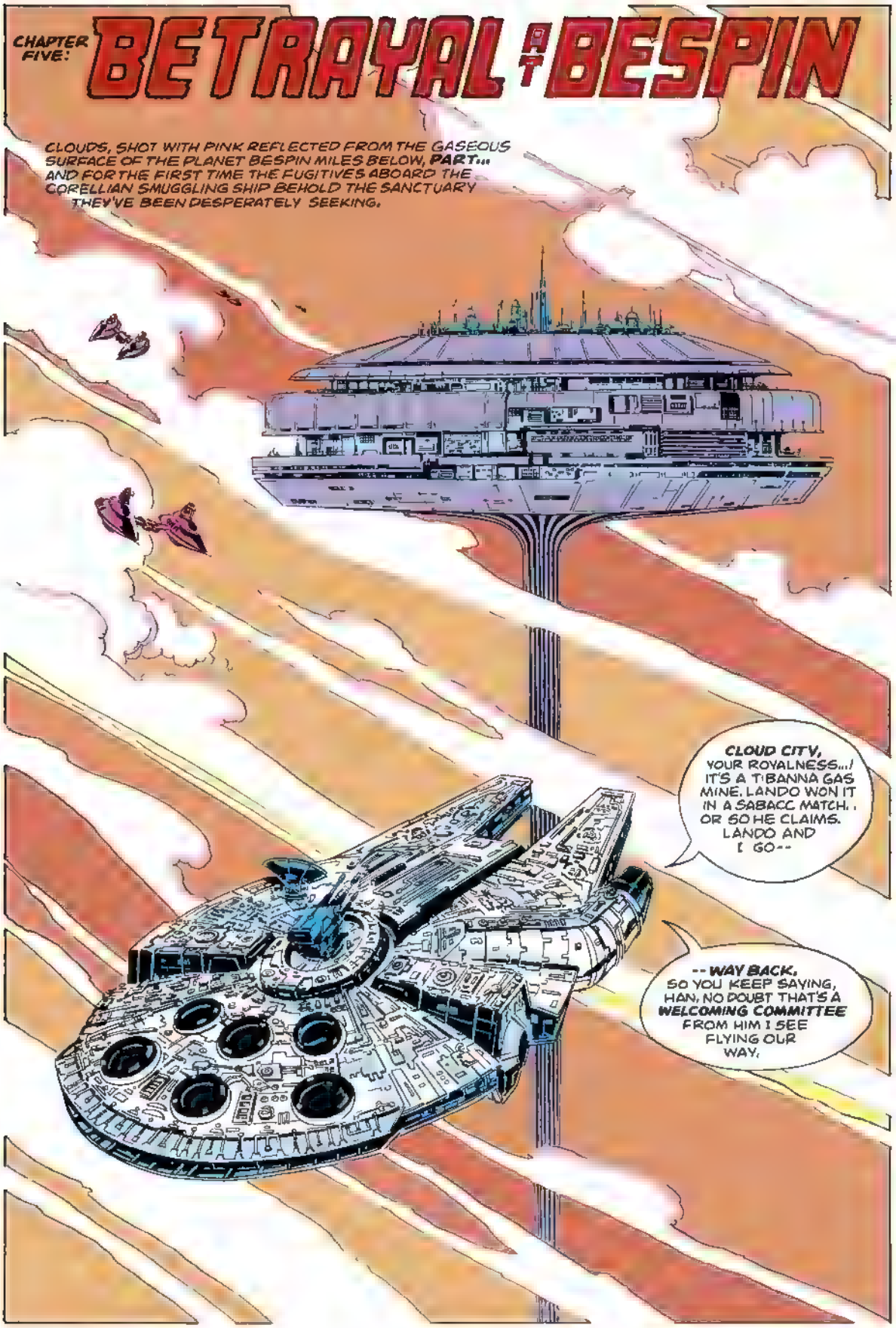
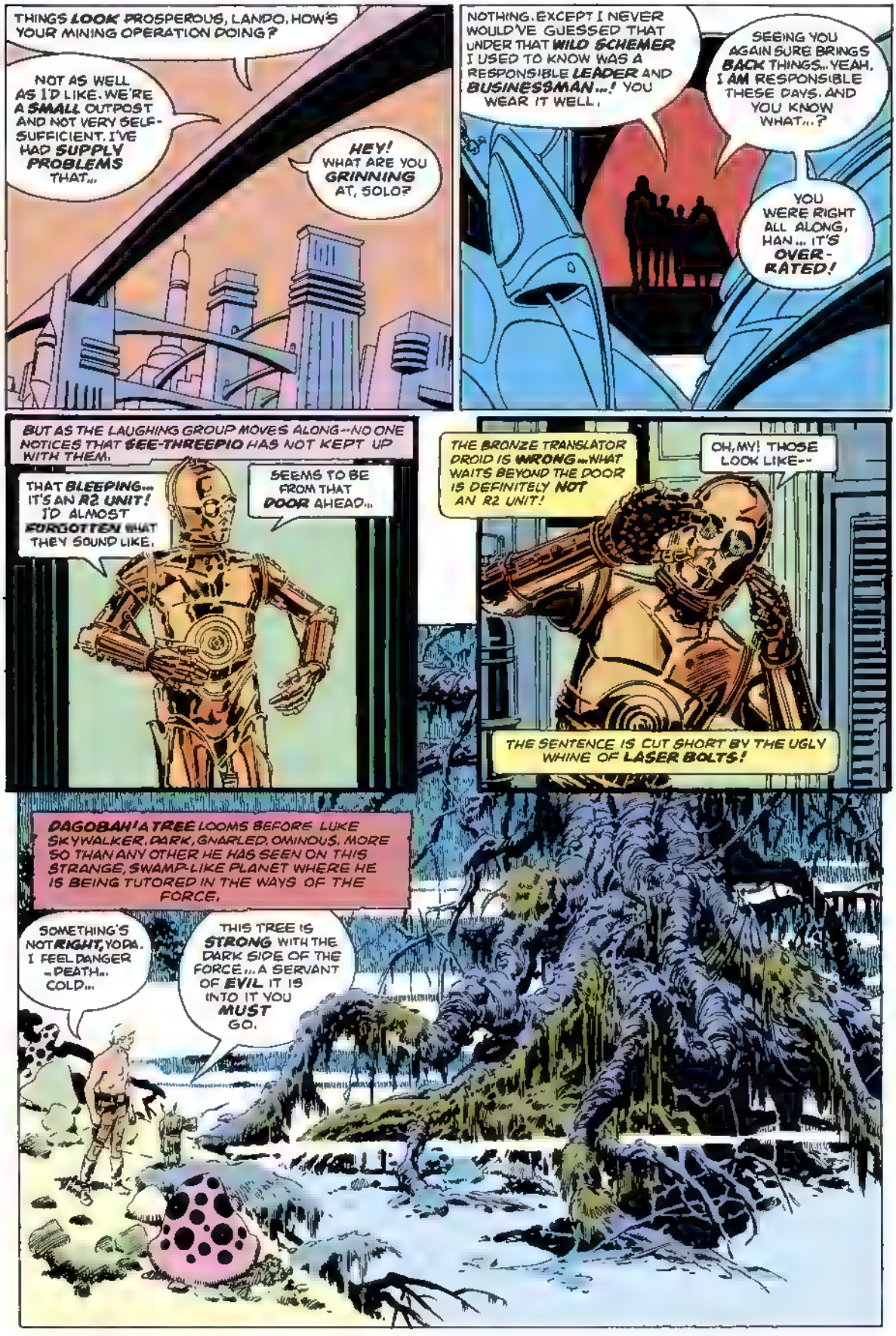
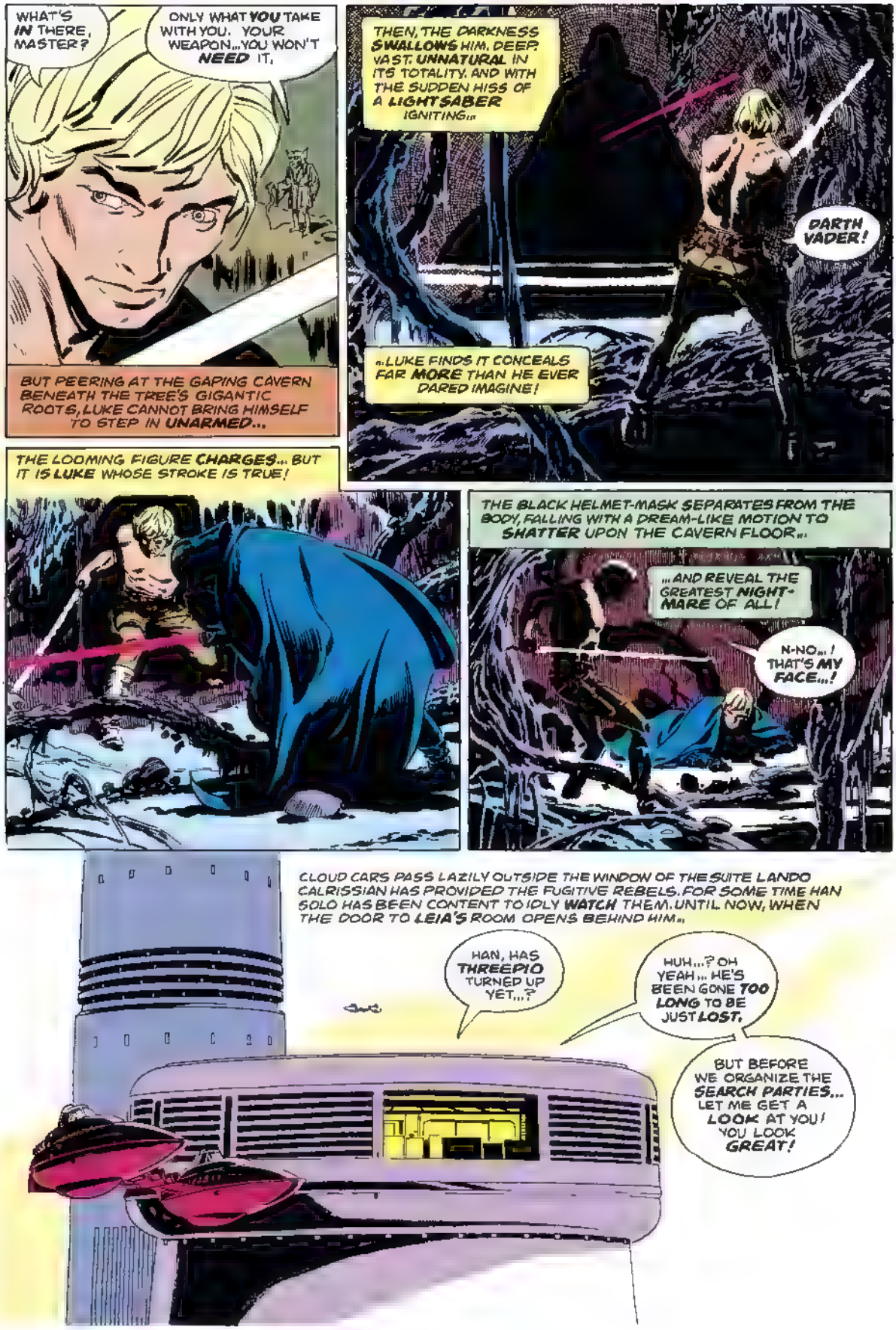
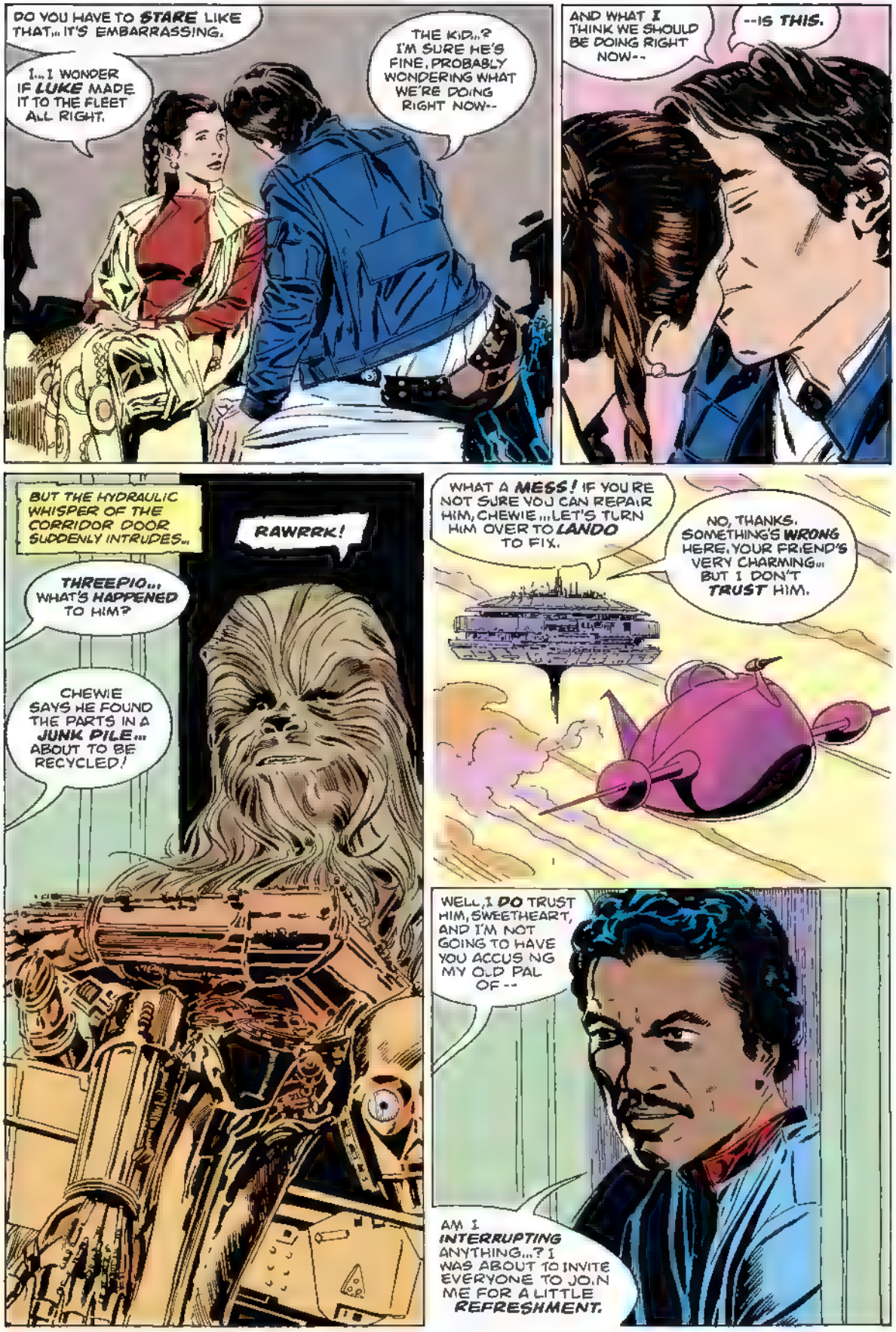

CHAPTER FIVE:
BETRAYAL AT BESPIN
CLOUDS, SHOT WITH PINK REFLECTED FROM THE GASEOUS SURFACE OF THE PLANET BESPIN MILES BELOW, PART... AND FOR THE FIRST TIME THE FUGITIVES ABOARD THE CORELLIAN SMUGGLING SHIP BEHOLD THE SANCTUARY THEY'VE BEEN DESPERATELY SEEKING.
CLOUD CITY, YOUR ROYALNESS...! IT'S A TIBANNA GAS MINE. LANDO WON IT IN A SABACC MATCH... OR SO HE CLAIMS. LANDO AND I GO--
--WAY BACK. SO YOU KEEP SAYING, HAN, NO DOUBT THAT'S A WELCOMING COMMITTEE FROM HIM I SEE FLYING OUR WAY.

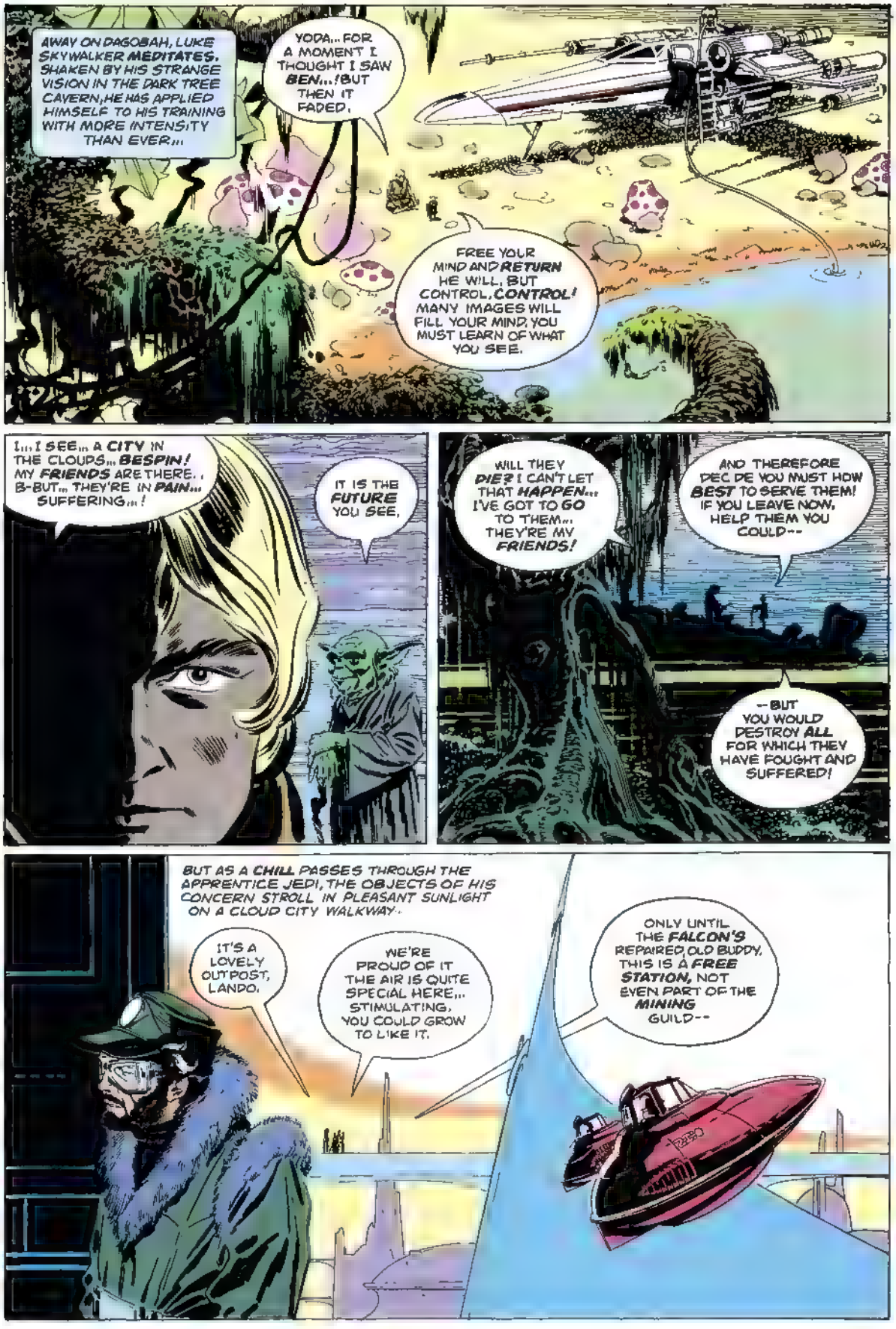
THAT IS A WARNING SHOT...! YOU DO NOT HAVE A LANDING PERMIT. PROCEED TO PLATFORM 327. ANY DEVIATION WILL RESULT IN YOUR DESTRUCTION!
OH, DEAR! RATHER TOUCHY, AREN'T THEY, CAPTAIN SOLO?
I THOUGHT YOU KNEW THESE PEOPLE...
WELL... IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
THE MILLENNIUM FALCON'S WOOKIEE FIRST MATE GIVES HIS PARTNER A LONG UNEASY GROWL...
...AS THE BATTERED FREIGHTER DESCENDS TO ITS BERTH.
THAT WAS A LONGTIME AGO CHEWIE. I'M SURE LANDO'S FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT IT--
--AND SO SHOULD YOU!
I DON'T LIKE THIS.
IT'LL BE ALL RIGHT. TRUST ME. BUT... KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN UH... JUST IN CASE.
LANDO! LANDO CALRISSIAN! DON'T TELL ME YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE ME--

HAN SOLO! YOU SLIMY, DOUBLE-CROSSING, NO-GOOD SWINDLER--
I CAN EXPLAIN EVERYTHING, BUDDY NO NEED FOR HARD FEELINGS ABOUT THE PAST. I ALWAYS SAID YOU WERE A GENTLEMAN--
I'LL BET!
SUDDENLY, LANDO CAN HOLD HIS SCOWL NO LONGER. LAUGHTER FILLS THE MORNING AIR...AND BLASTERS ARE SWIFTLY LOWERED.
YOU SONUVAGUN! YOU REALLY HAD ME GOIN' FOR A SECOND!
THAT STILL LEAVES YOU A COUPLE OF BLUFFS AHEAD, ACE! COME ON... INTRODUCE ME TO YOUR FRIENDS.
CHEWBACCA, HE ALREADY KNOWS. AND OF THE OTHER TWO TRAVELERS, THE MINING FACILITY'S ADMINISTRATOR IS MOST OBVIOUSLY CHARMED BY PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA.
THE LADY'S WITH ME, LANDO... AND I DON'T INTEND TO GAMBLE HER AWAY. SO YOU MIGHT JUST AS WELL FORGET SHE EXISTS...
WE'RE ONLY GONNA BE HERE LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE REPAIRS.
REPAIRS? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY SHIP?
LANDO USED TO OWN THE FALCON. HE SOMETIMES FORGETS THAT HE LOST HER FAIR AND SQUARE.
THAT SHIP SAVED MY LIFE MORE THAN A FEW TIMES, IT'S THE FASTEST HUNK OF JUNK IN THE GALAXY! WHAT'S WRONG WITH HER?
HYPERDRIVE.
I'LL HAVE MY PEOPLE GET TO WORK RIGHT AWAY. HATE THE THOUGHT OF THE MILLENNIUM FALCON WITHOUT HER HEART!

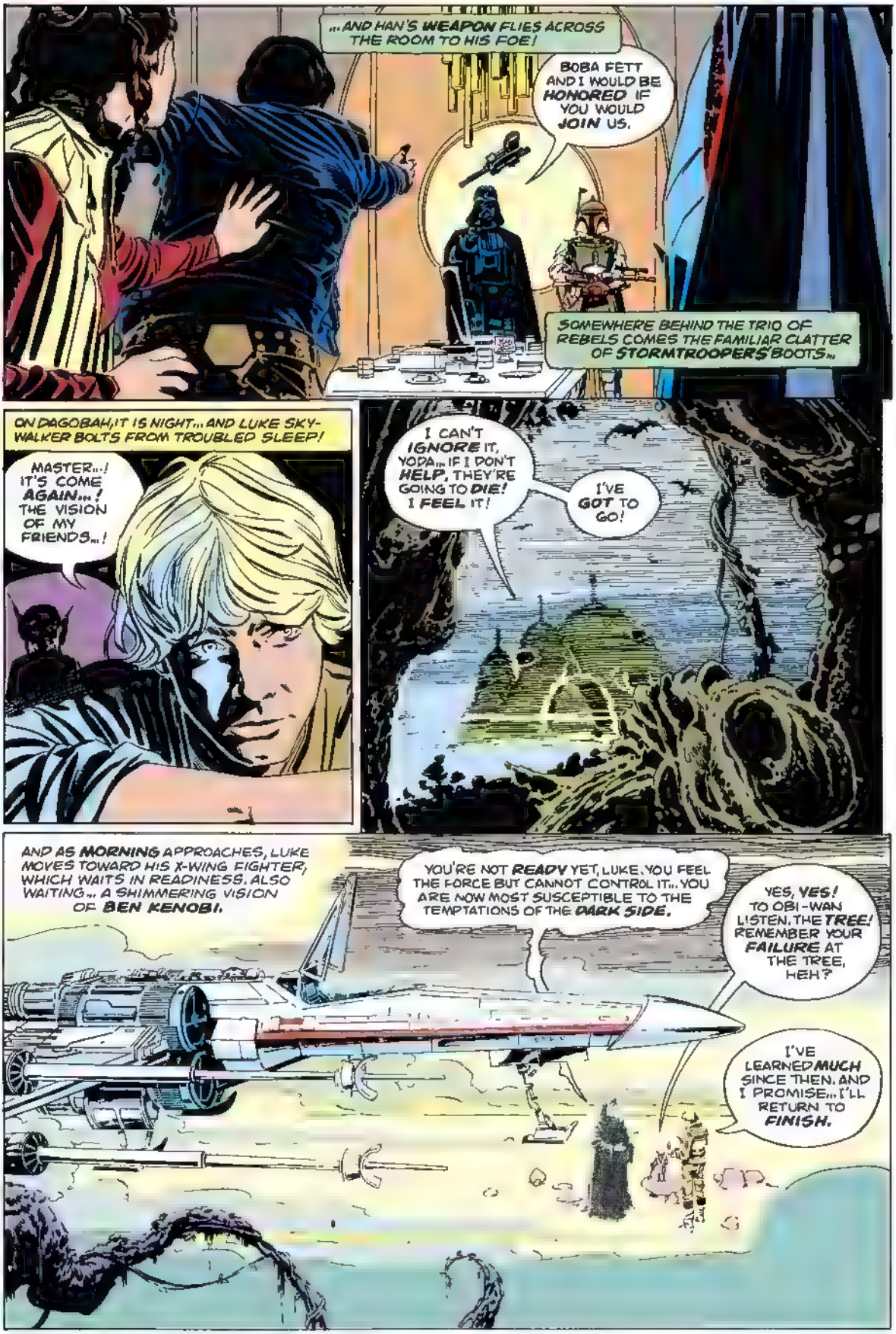

THINGS LOOK PROSPEROUS, LANDO. HOW'S YOUR MINING OPERATION DOING?
NOT AS WELL AS I'D LIKE. WE'RE A SMALL OUTPOST AND NOT VERY SELF-SUFFICIENT. I'VE HAD SUPPLY PROBLEMS THAT...
HEY! WHAT ARE YOU GRINNING AT, SOLO?
NOTHING. EXCEPT I NEVER WOULD'VE GUESSED THAT UNDER THAT WILD SCHEMER I USED TO KNOW WAS A RESPONSIBLE LEADER AND BUSINESSMAN...! YOU WEAR IT WELL.
SEEING YOU AGAIN SURE BRINGS BACK THINGS... YEAH, I AM RESPONSIBLE THESE DAYS. AND YOU KNOW WHAT...?
YOU WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG, HAN... IT'S OVER-RATED!
BUT AS THE LAUGHING GROUP MOVES ALONG--NO ONE NOTICES THAT SEE-THREEPIO HAS NOT KEPT UP WITH THEM.
THAT BLEEPING... IT'S AN R2 UNIT! I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN WHAT THEY SOUND LIKE.
SEEMS TO BE FROM THAT DOOR AHEAD...
THE BRONZE TRANSLATOR DROID IS WRONG...WHAT WAITS BEYOND THE DOOR IS DEFINITELY NOT AN R2 UNIT!
OH, MY! THOSE LOOK LIKE--
THE SENTENCE IS CUT SHORT BY THE UGLY WHINE OF LASER BOLTS!
DAGOBAH! A TREE LOOMS BEFORE LUKE SKYWALKER, DARK, GNARLED, OMINOUS, MORE SO THAN ANY OTHER HE HAS SEEN ON THIS STRANGE, SWAMP-LIKE PLANET WHERE HE IS BEING TUTORED IN THE WAYS OF THE FORCE.
SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT, YODA. I FEEL DANGER ...DEATH... COLD...
THIS TREE IS STRONG WITH THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE... A SERVANT OF EVIL IT IS INTO IT YOU MUST GO.


WHAT'S IN THERE, MASTER?
ONLY WHAT YOU TAKE WITH YOU. YOUR WEAPON...YOU WON'T NEED IT.
BUT PEERING AT THE GAPING CAVERN BENEATH THE TREE'S GIGANTIC ROOTS, LUKE CANNOT BRING HIMSELF TO STEP IN UNARMED...
THEN, THE DARKNESS SWALLOWS HIM. DEEP. VAST. UNNATURAL IN ITS TOTALITY. AND WITH THE SUDDEN HISS OF A LIGHTSABER IGNITING...
DARTH VADER!
...LUKE FINDS IT CONCEALS FAR MORE THAN HE EVER DARED IMAGINE!
THE LOOMING FIGURE CHARGES... BUT IT IS LUKE WHOSE STROKE IS TRUE!
THE BLACK HELMET-MASK SEPARATES FROM THE BODY, FALLING WITH A DREAM-LIKE MOTION TO SHATTER UPON THE CAVERN FLOOR...
...AND REVEAL THE GREATEST NIGHT-MARE OF ALL!
N-NO...! THAT'S MY FACE...!
CLOUD CARS PASS LAZILY OUTSIDE THE WINDOW OF THE SUITE LANDO CALRISSIAN HAS PROVIDED THE FUGITIVE REBELS. FOR SOME TIME HAN SOLO HAS BEEN CONTENT TO IDLY WATCH THEM. UNTIL NOW, WHEN THE DOOR TO LEIA'S ROOM OPENS BEHIND HIM...
HAN, HAS THREEPIO TURNED UP YET...?
HUH...? OH YEAH... HE'S BEEN GONE TOO LONG TO BE JUST LOST.
BUT BEFORE WE ORGANIZE THE SEARCH PARTIES... LET ME GET A LOOK AT YOU! YOU LOOK GREAT!


DO YOU HAVE TO STARE LIKE THAT... IT'S EMBARRASSING.
I... I WONDER IF LUKE MADE IT TO THE FLEET ALL RIGHT.
THE KID...? I'M SURE HE'S FINE, PROBABLY WONDERING WHAT WE'RE DOING RIGHT NOW--
AND WHAT I THINK WE SHOULD BE DOING RIGHT NOW--
--IS THIS.
BUT THE HYDRAULIC WHISPER OF THE CORRIDOR DOOR SUDDENLY INTRUDES...
RAWRRK!
THREEPIO... WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM?
CHEWIE SAYS HE FOUND THE PARTS IN A JUNK PILE... ABOUT TO BE RECYCLED!
WHAT A MESS! IF YOU'RE NOT SURE YOU CAN REPAIR HIM, CHEWIE... LET'S TURN HIM OVER TO LANDO TO FIX.
NO, THANKS. SOMETHING'S WRONG HERE. YOUR FRIEND'S VERY CHARMING... BUT I DON'T TRUST HIM.
WELL, I DO TRUST HIM, SWEETHEART, AND I'M NOT GOING TO HAVE YOU ACCUSING MY OLD PAL OF--
AM I INTERRUPTING ANYTHING...? I WAS ABOUT TO INVITE EVERYONE TO JOIN ME FOR A LITTLE REFRESHMENT.


AWAY ON DAGOBAH, LUKE SKYWALKER MEDITATES. SHAKEN BY HIS STRANGE VISION IN THE DARK TREE CAVERN, HE HAS APPLIED HIMSELF TO HIS TRAINING WITH MORE INTENSITY THAN EVER...
YODA... FOR A MOMENT I THOUGHT I SAW BEN...! BUT THEN IT FADED.
FREE YOUR MIND AND RETURN HE WILL. BUT CONTROL, CONTROL! MANY IMAGES WILL FILL YOUR MIND, YOU MUST LEARN OF WHAT YOU SEE.
I... I SEE... A CITY IN THE CLOUDS... BESPIN! MY FRIENDS ARE THERE... B-BUT... THEY'RE IN PAIN... SUFFERING...!
IT IS THE FUTURE YOU SEE.
WILL THEY DIE? I CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN... I'VE GOT TO GO TO THEM... THEY'RE MY FRIENDS!
AND THEREFORE YOU MUST HOW BEST TO SERVE THEM! IF YOU LEAVE NOW, HELP THEM YOU COULD--
-- BUT YOU WOULD DESTROY ALL FOR WHICH THEY HAVE FOUGHT AND SUFFERED!
BUT AS A CHILL PASSES THROUGH THE APPRENTICE JEDI, THE OBJECTS OF HIS CONCERN STROLL IN PLEASANT SUNLIGHT ON A CLOUD CITY WALKWAY.
IT'S A LOVELY OUTPOST, LANDO.
WE'RE PROUD OF IT THE AIR IS QUITE SPECIAL HERE... STIMULATING. YOU COULD GROW TO LIKE IT.
ONLY UNTIL THE FALCON'S REPAIRED, OLD BUDDY. THIS IS A FREE STATION, NOT EVEN PART OF THE MINING GUILD--

--AREN'T YOU AFRAID THE EMPIRE WILL SOMEDAY LEARN OF YOUR UNOFFICIAL LITTLE OPERATION AND SHUT YOU DOWN?
THAT'S ALWAYS BEEN A DANGER... LOOMING OVER EVERYTHING WE'VE BUILT HERE LIKE A SHADOW.
BUT CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE DEVELOPED WHICH WILL INSURE SECURITY. YOU SEE, I'VE JUST MADE A DEAL--
--IT'LL KEEP THE EMPIRE OUT OF HERE FOREVER.
CHEWBACCA TRIES TO SNARL A WARNING AS SOMETHING STRIKES HIS SENSES. BUT THE DOORS TO THE DINING HALL ARE ALREADY SWINGING OPEN, AND BEHIND THEM...
SORRY, FRIEND, I HAD NO CHOICE. THEY ARRIVED RIGHT BEFORE YOU DID.
YEAH, LANDO--
...I'M SORRY, TOO!
THE DRAW...THE SHOT... ARE FANTASTICALLY SWIFT PERHAPS THE BEST HAN HAS EVER MADE IN A LONG CAREER OF BEING GOOD WITH A BLASTER...
AGAINST ANY OTHER OPPONENT, THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN DEVASTATING. ANY BUT DARTH VADER, LORD OF THE SITH!
THE BOLTS ARE DEFLECTED AWAY TO EXPLODE HARMLESSLY AGAINST THE WALLS...

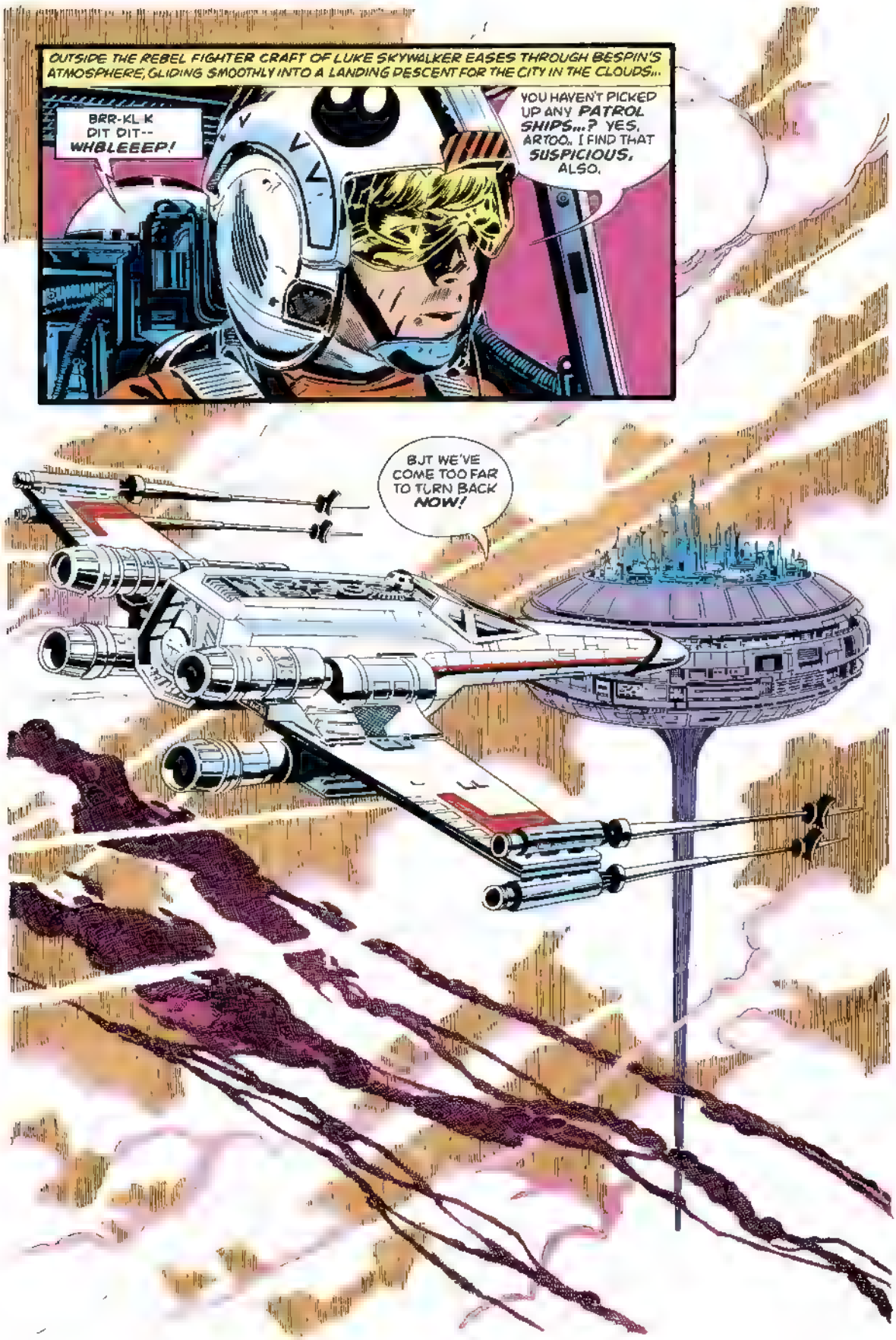

...AND HAN'S WEAPON FLIES ACROSS THE ROOM TO HIS FOE!
BOBA FETT AND I WOULD BE HONORED IF YOU WOULD JOIN US.
SOMEWHERE BEHIND THE TRIO OF REBELS COMES THE FAMILIAR CLATTER OF STORMTROOPERS' BOOTS...
ON DAGOBAH, IT IS NIGHT... AND LUKE SKY-WALKER BOLTS FROM TROUBLED SLEEP!
MASTER...! IT'S COME AGAIN...! THE VISION OF MY FRIENDS...!
I CAN'T IGNORE IT, YODA... IF I DON'T HELP, THEY'RE GOING TO DIE! I FEEL IT!
I'VE GOT TO GO!
AND AS MORNING APPROACHES, LUKE MOVES TOWARD HIS X-WING FIGHTER, WHICH WAITS IN READINESS. ALSO WAITING... A SHIMMERING VISION OF BEN KENOBI.
YOU'RE NOT READY YET, LUKE. YOU FEEL THE FORCE BUT CANNOT CONTROL IT... YOU ARE NOW MOST SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE DARK SIDE.
YES, YES! TO OBI-WAN LISTEN. THE TREE! REMEMBER YOUR FAILURE AT THE TREE, HEH?
I'VE LEARNED MUCH SINCE THEN. AND I PROMISE... I'LL RETURN TO FINISH.

ONLY A FULLY-TRAINED JEDI KNIGHT WILL CONQUER VADER AND HIS EMPEROR! CHOOSE THE QUICK AND EASY PATH AND YOU'LL BECOME AN AGENT OF EVIL, PLUNGING THE GALAXY INTO THE ABYSS OF HATE AND DESPAIR.
YOU ARE THE LAST JEDI, LUKE. BE PATIENT.
AND SACRIFICE HAN AND LEIA...? I CAN'T, BEN... I CAN'T!
TURMOIL RAGING WITHIN HIM, THE YOUNG HERO OF THE DEATH STAR BATTLE CLIMBS INTO THE X-WING COCKPIT... AND READIES FOR TAKE-OFF.
LUKE, I CANNOT PROTECT YOU. IF YOU CHOOSE TO FACE VADER... YOU DO IT ALONE. USE THE FORCE FOR DEFENSE... DON'T GIVE IN TO HATE, ANGER, FEAR. THEY LEAD THE WAY TO THE DARK SIDE.
I-I'LL REMEMBER, BEN, AND... I GIVE YOU MY WORD I'LL BE BACK!
THEN, WITH A ROAR OF ROCKET ENGINES... THE FIGHTER CRAFT SOARS UP INTO THE MISTS.
HE'S STILL RECKLESS, YODA... THINGS ARE GOING TO GET WORSE I FEAR. BUT THE BOY IS OUR LAST HOPE.
NO, OBI-WAN... THERE IS ANOTHER.
IN THE CLOUD CITY ABOVE BESPIN... SCREAMS ARE HEARD. THEY COME FROM HAN SOLO.
DARTH VADER LISTENS FOR A WHILE WITHOUT GREAT INTEREST, THEN TURNS...
...TO JOIN BOBA FETT AND LANDO CALRISSIAN.
I'M CONCERNED THAT THE CAPTAIN NOT BE DAMAGED, LORD VADER. JABBA THE HUT PAYS DOUBLE IF HE'S ALIVE.
HIS PAIN IS GREAT, BOUNTY HUNTER... WITHOUT BEING PERMANENT. BUT YOU DON'T GET HIM... UNTIL I HAVE SKYWALKER.
WHAT ABOUT LEIA AND THE WOOKIEE...?

YOUR MEN SAID SOMETHING ABOUT THEM NEVER LEAVING THIS CITY. KEEPING THEM PRISONER HERE WASN'T A CONDITION OF OUR AGREEMENT.. NOR WAS GIVING HAN TO THIS BOUNTY HUNTER!
I HOPE YOU DON'T THINK YOU'RE BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY, CALRISSIAN--
--IT WOULD BE MOST UNFORTUNATE IF I HAD TO LEAVE A PERMANENT GARRISON AT YOUR OUTPOST.
LANDO IS TOO MUCH OF A SURVIVOR TO DO ANYTHING BUT KEEP SILENT, UNTIL THE DARK LORD AND BOBA FETT DEPART.
YOU KNOW, LOBOT, THIS DEAL'S GETTING WORSE ALL THE TIME.
I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS!
THE CLOUD CITY DETENTION CELLS. CHEWBACCA COVERS MOUNTING CONCERN BY CONCENTRATING ON THE INTRICATE TASK OF REPAIRING AN UNAPPRECIATIVE ROBOTS...
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, YOU FLEA-BITTEN FURBALL.. MY HEAD'S ON BACKWARD!
IS THERE NO END TO A DROID'S SUFFERING? BLASTED TO PIECES FOR ACCIDENTALLY BUMPING INTO SOME STORMTROOPERS... AND NOW DEFORMED BY AN OVERGROWN MOPHEAD!
THEN... THE DOOR HISSES OPEN! AND CHEWIE AND HIS FELLOW PRISONER, LEIA ORGANA, SEE...
WAAAARRK!
HAN!
AND AS THE STORMTROOPERS LEAVE...
I'M... ALL RIGHT... HAD ME HOWLING ON THE SCAN GRID... BUT THEY NEVER ASKED ME ANY QUESTIONS, OR--
LANDO! GET OUT OF HERE!
SHUT UP AND LISTEN..! I'M DOING WHAT I CAN TO MAKE THINGS EASIER. I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE PRICE ON YOUR HEAD, BUT VADER HAS AGREED TO--

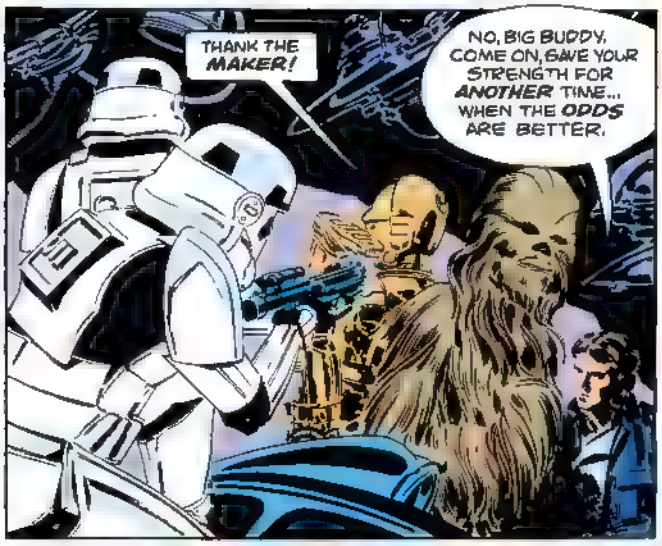
YOU DON'T KNOW MUCH IF YOU THINK DARTH VADER WANTS ALL OF US ANYTHING BUT DEAD BEFORE THIS THING IS OVER!
HE DOESN'T WANT YOU AT ALL, HAN! HE'S SETTING A TRAP FOR SOME YOUNG REBEL NAMED SKYWALKER... YOU PEOPLE ARE THE BAIT.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT THE KID, BUT THE IMPERIALS HAVE PINPOINTED THAT HE'S ON HIS WAY...
LUKE'S COMING HERE...? YOU FIXED US ALL PRETTY GOOD--
--FRIEND!
FOR A MOMENT IT'S A FIGHT... UNTIL LANDO'S GUARDS MOVE IN, CLUBBING WITH THEIR BLASTERS!
OKAY... ENOUGH! I'VE DONE AS MUCH AS I CAN, I WISH IT WERE MORE... BUT I'VE GOT MY OWN PROBLEMS.
I'VE ALREADY STUCK MY NECK OUT FARTHER THAN I SHOULD.
YEAH, YEAH, LANDO ... YOU'RE A REAL HERO!
WHIRLING, THE CLOUD CITY ADMINISTRATOR STALKS OUT...
YOU CERTAINLY HAVE A WAY WITH PEOPLE...!

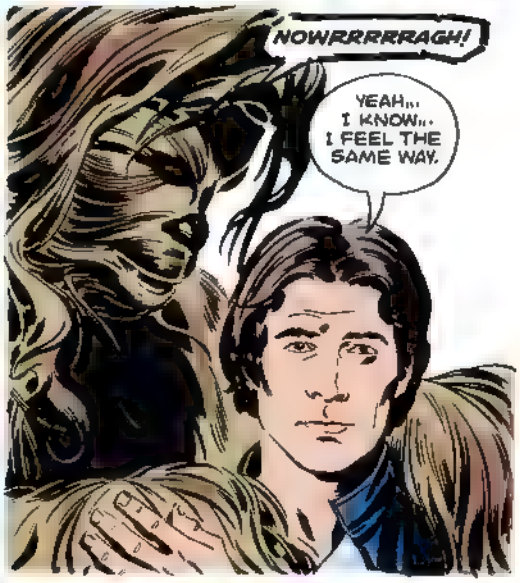
LEAVING THE DETENTION AREA, LANDO FINDS HE'S WANTED, WANTED BY THE LAST PERSON HE CARES TO SEE... AND THE ONLY ONE HE DARES NOT REFUSE.
LORD VADER, THE X-WING CLASS SHIP YOU'VE HAD US MONITOR IS NOW APPROACHING.
GOOD. ALLOW SKYWALKER TO LAND, WE'LL BE READY FOR HIM SHORTLY.
THIS FACILITY IS CRUDE, CALRISSIAN... BUT IT SHOULD MEET MY NEEDS.
BRING IN SOLO.
WE ONLY USE THIS PLACE FOR CARBON FREEZING. IF YOU PUT HIM THROUGH THAT... IT MIGHT KILL HIM.
I DON'T WISH THE EMPEROR'S PRIZE TO BE DAMAGED... WE'LL TEST IT FIRST.

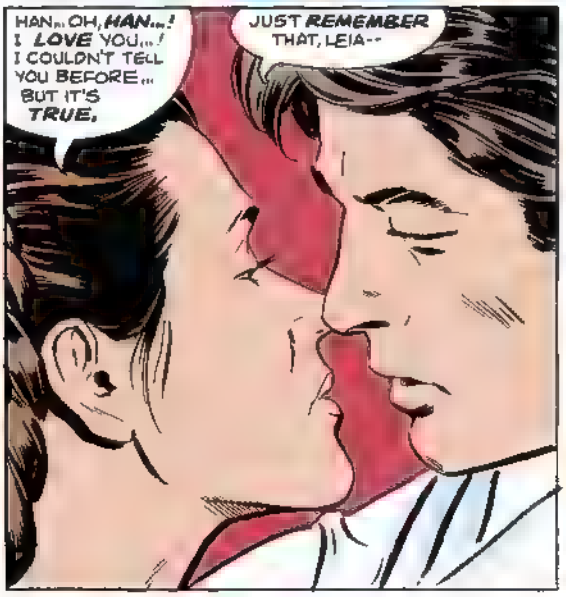

OUTSIDE THE REBEL FIGHTER CRAFT OF LUKE SKYWALKER EASES THROUGH BESPIN'S ATMOSPHERE, GLIDING SMOOTHLY INTO A LANDING DESCENT FOR THE CITY IN THE CLOUDS...
BRR-KL K DIT DIT-- WHBLEEEP!
YOU HAVEN'T PICKED UP ANY PATROL SHIPS...? YES, ARTOO. I FIND THAT SUSPICIOUS, ALSO.
BJT WE'VE COME TOO FAR TO TURN BACK NOW!

RESPONDING INSTANTLY TO THEIR LEADER'S COMMAND... STORMTROOPERS BRING HAN. TOO SOON THE TEST OF THE CARBON-FREEZING CHAMBER IS READY TO BEGIN... BEFORE AN AUDIENCE OF THE WILLING AND THE UNWILLING.
THE EMPIRE WILL COMPENSATE YOU FOR THE LOSS.
PUT HIM IN THE CHAMBER!
NO!
WHAT IF SOLO DOESN'T SURVIVE, LORD VADER? BEYOND WHAT YOU'RE PAYING... HE'S WORTH A LOT TO ME.

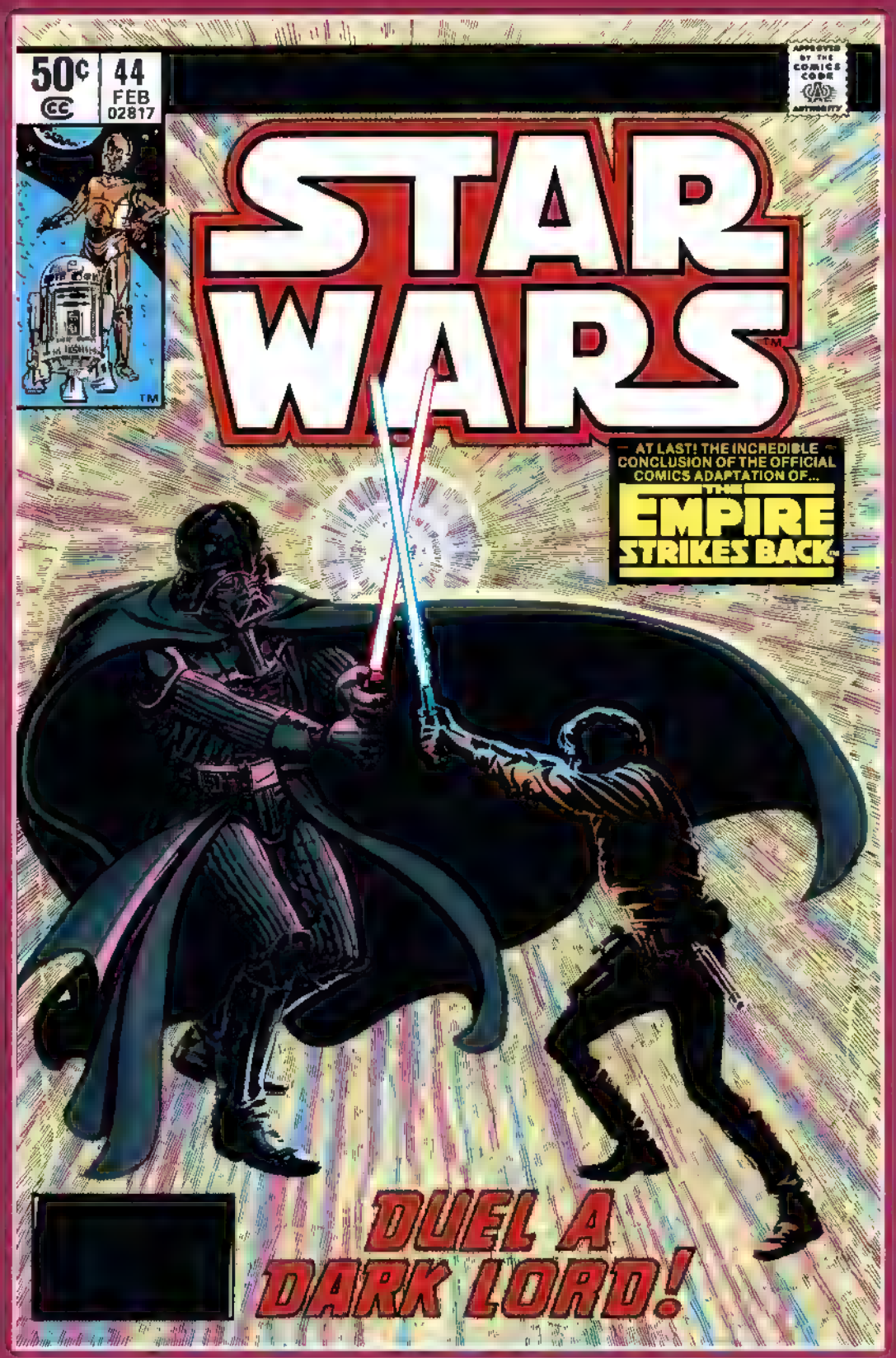
LEIA'S CRY TRIGGERS THE GIANT WOOKIEE INTO ACTION. TROOPERS POUR FORWARD FOR THE KILL... UNTIL HAN INTERCEDES.







SWIFTLY THE CAPTAIN OF THE MILLENNIUM FALCON IS STRAPPED TO THE CHAMBER'S HYDRAULIC LIFT PLATFORM. HE HAS TIME FOR A BRIEF GLANCE AT HIS FRIENDS. THEN, TO THEIR HORROR, THE PLATFORM DROPS...
...AND FIERY LIQUID CASCADES DOWN INTO THE OPENING FROM THE VETS ABOVE!
THEY'RE ENCASING HIM IN CARBONITE... IT'S A HIGH-QUALITY ALLOY. MUCH BETTER THAN MY OWN. HE SHOULD BE QUITE WELL PROTECTED... IF HE SURVIVED THE FREEZING PROCESS.
AND NO ONE AT THE SCENE KNOWS BETTER WHAT A BIG "IF" THAT IS THAN LANDO CALRISSIAN...
...WHO WINCES IN SORROW AT HOW FAR THE PRICE OF SUCCESS HAS TAKEN HIM.
ELSEWHERE, A DOOR FROM THE LANDING AREA SLIDES BACK. FOR A MOMENT, LUKE SKYWALKER HESITATES, LETTING HIS FEELINGS REACH OUT TO THE SILENT, OMINOUSLY DESERTED CORRIDORS BEYOND...
...THEN, HE MOVES GRIMLY AND URGENTLY FORWARD INTO CLOUD CITY... AND WHATEVER LIES AHEAD.
NEXT ISSUE:
DUEL A DARK LORD!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STAR WARS™ THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

AIDED BY THE BOUNTY HUNTER, BOBA FETT, DARTH VADER SETS A TRAP FOR LUKE... USING LEIA AND HAN AS BAIT! AGAINST THE JUDGEMENT OF HIS JEDI MASTER, YODA, AND THE GHOSTLY VISION OF BEN KENOBI... LUKE ABANDONS HIS TRAINING IN THE WAYS OF THE FORCE TO RUSH TO THEIR RESCUE!

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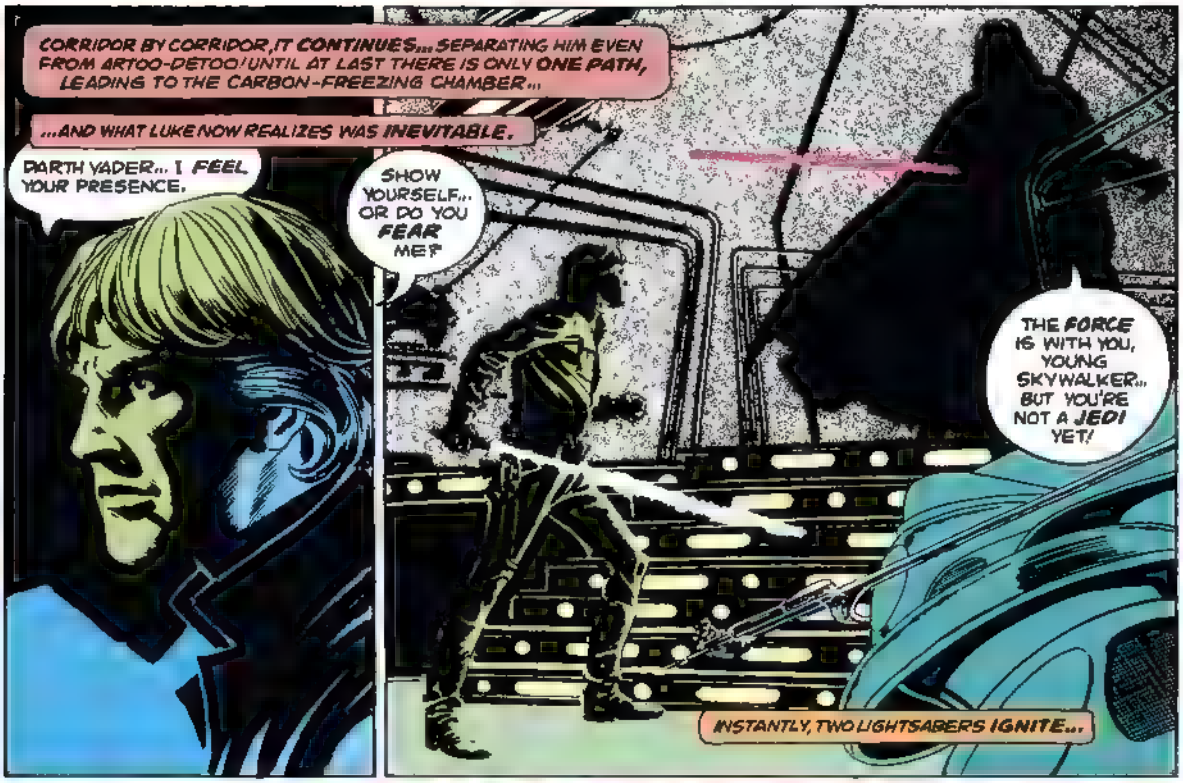
CHAPTER SIX:

DUEL A DARK LORD!

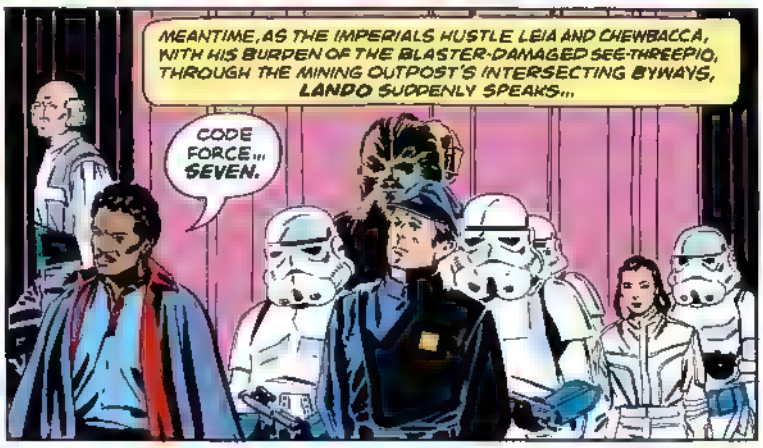
OMINOUS SILENCE HANGS OVER THE CARBON-FREEZING CHAMBER OF BESPIN'S CLOUD CITY. THE PROCESS IS COMPLETE...THE RESULTS NOW STAND FOR ALL PRESENT TO VIEW, AS ADMINISTRATOR LANDO CALRISSIAN TENSELY CHECKS READ-OUT GAUGES AND TRIES TO DETERMINE IF THE OLD FRIEND HE BETRAYED TO SAVE HIS OUTPOST CITY IS DEAD OR...
HE'S ALIVE...! AND IN PERFECT HIBERNATION!
THEN SOLO IS ALL YOURS, BOUNTY HUNTER... TAKE HIM TO JABBA THE HUT IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WISH.
AND NOW THAT WE'RE CERTAIN IT PRESERVES WITHOUT KILLING...RESET THE CHAMBER FOR SKYWALKER!

MONITORS REPORT THAT HE'S JUST LANDED, MY LORD.
GOOD. SEE THAT HE FINDS HIS WAY HERE.
AND MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A PERMANENT GARRISON TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE--
--SO THE PRINCESS AND SOLO'S WOOKIEE COMPANION CAN STILL BE WATCHED OVER WHILE IN CALRISSIAN'S CARE.
THAT WASN'T OUR BARGAIN! YOU SAID THE EMPIRE WOULDN'T INTERFERE IN--
I'M ALTERING THE BARGAIN, PRAY I DON'T ALTER IT ANY FURTHER.
AND LANDO FEELS A SUDDEN CONSTRICTION IN HIS THROAT. PAINFUL...BUT BRIEF. MERELY A REMINDER... FOR NOW.
MEANWHILE, THROUGH EERILY DESERTED CORRIDORS, LUKE SKYWALKER ADVANCES CAUTIOUSLY TOWARD THE TIBANNA GAS MINING COMMUNITY'S CENTER. THEN...
QUIET, ARTOO THERE'S SOME KIND OF JUNCTION AHEAD--
SOMEONE'S COMING!
HAN! T-THAT'S HAN THEY'RE CARRYING...!
WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO HIM...?!
BOBA FETT AND THE STORMTROOPER ESCORTS OF THE CARBONITE-ENTOMBED CORELLIAN WHIRL TO FIRE...

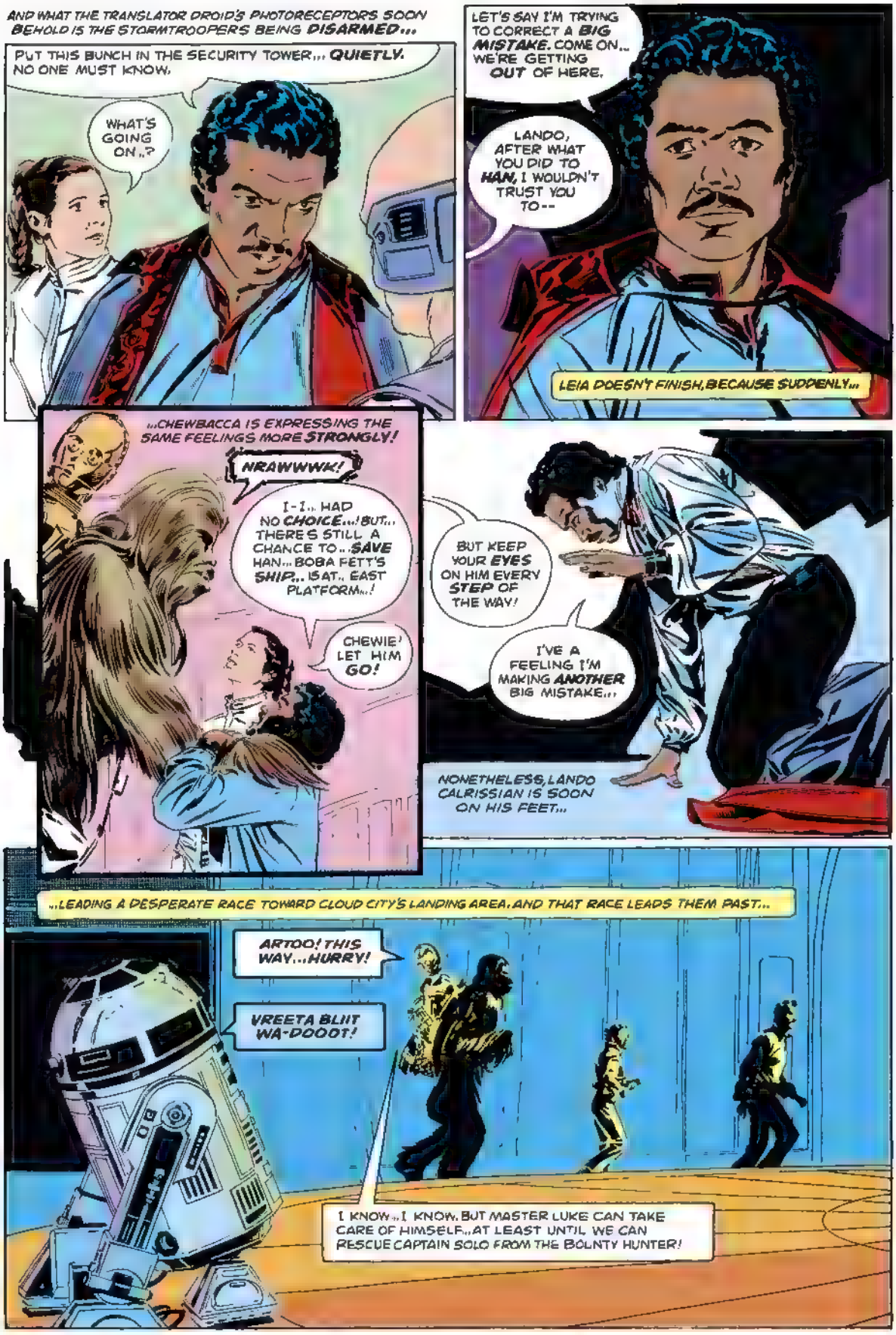
...ONLY TO FIND THAT THE APPRENTICE JEDI IS TOO SWIFT!
HIS SHOT HITS TWO TROOPERS.
BUT LUKE'S ATTEMPT TO GIVE CHASE IS CUT SHORT BY A [illegible] FROM BOBA FETT...
...AND THE SUDDEN DESCENT OF A BLAST SHIELD DOOR!
HE SPINS, LOOKING FOR ANOTHER WAY TO FOLLOW, AND SEES INSTEAD...
LEIA! CHEWBACCA! THREEPIO!
LUKE!
GET OUT OF HERE!
GET OUT OF CLOUD CITY...
IT'S A TRAP!
AGAIN A BLAST SHIELD THUNDERS DOWN, CUTTING LUKE OFF FROM THOSE HE HOPES TO SAVE...


CORRIDOR BY CORRIDOR, IT CONTINUES... SEPARATING HIM EVEN FROM ARTOO-DETOO! UNTIL AT LAST THERE IS ONLY ONE PATH, LEADING TO THE CARBON-FREEZING CHAMBER...
...AND WHAT LUKE NOW REALIZES WAS INEVITABLE.
DARTH VADER... I FEEL YOUR PRESENCE.
SHOW YOURSELF... OR DO YOU FEAR ME?
THE FORCE IS WITH YOU, YOUNG SKYWALKER... BUT YOU'RE NOT A JEDI YET!
INSTANTLY, TWO LIGHTSABERS IGNITE...

AND WITH A GREAT LEAP FROM LUKE, BORN OF HIS INTENSE TRAINING WITH YODA...
"...A BATTLE, LONG COMING, IS JOINED!

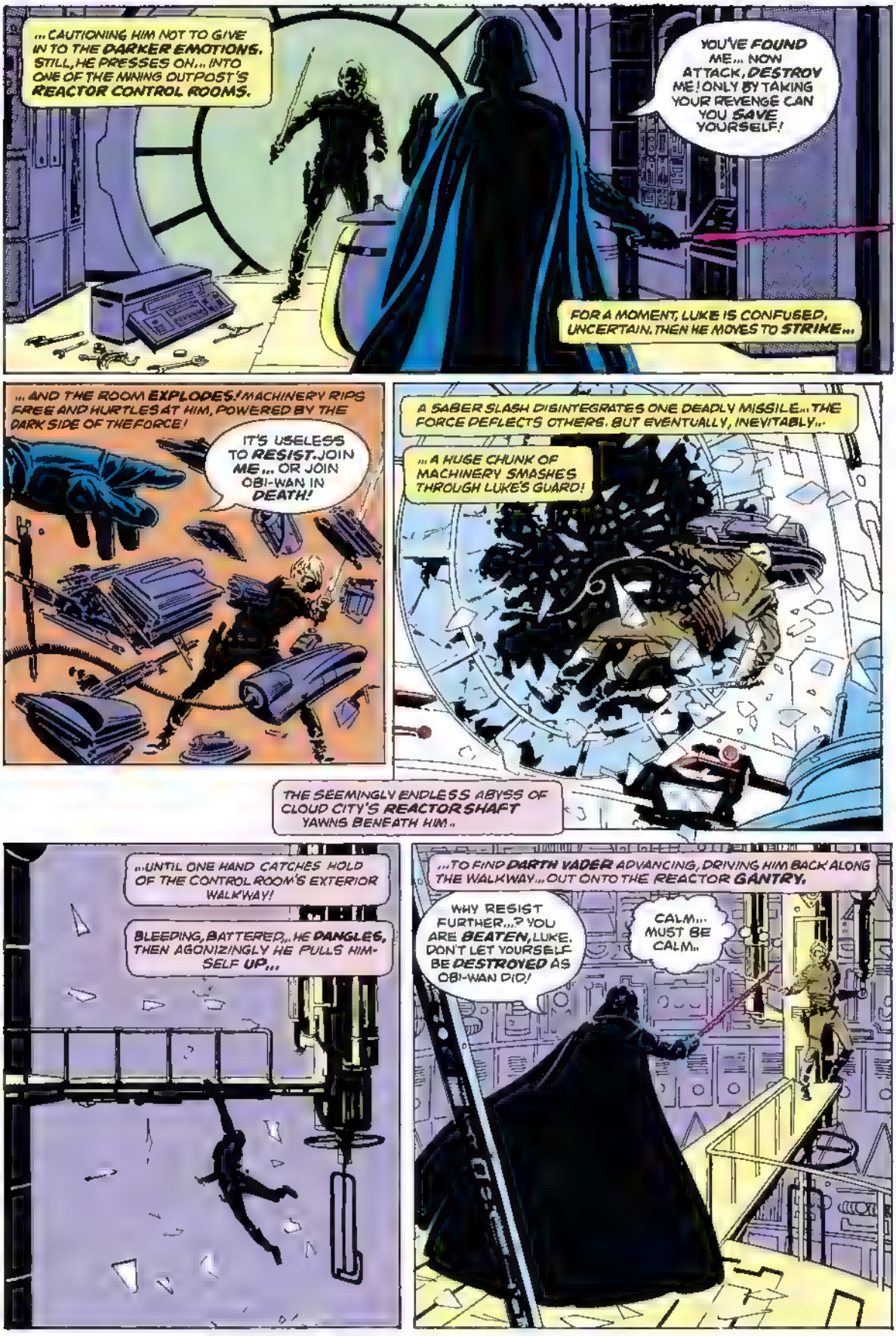

MEANTIME, AS THE IMPERIALS HUSTLE LEIA AND CHEWBACCA, WITH HIS BURDEN OF THE BLASTER-DAMAGED SEE-THREEPIO, THROUGH THE MINING OUTPOST'S INTERSECTING BYWAYS, LANDO SUDDENLY SPEAKS...
CODE FORCE... SEVEN.

ALMOST INSTANTLY, CLOUD CITY GUARDS SURROUND THEM ALL.
WHAT'S HAPPENED, CHEWBACCA? TURN ME AROUND SO I CAN SEE, YOU OVERSTUFFED HAIRBALL!

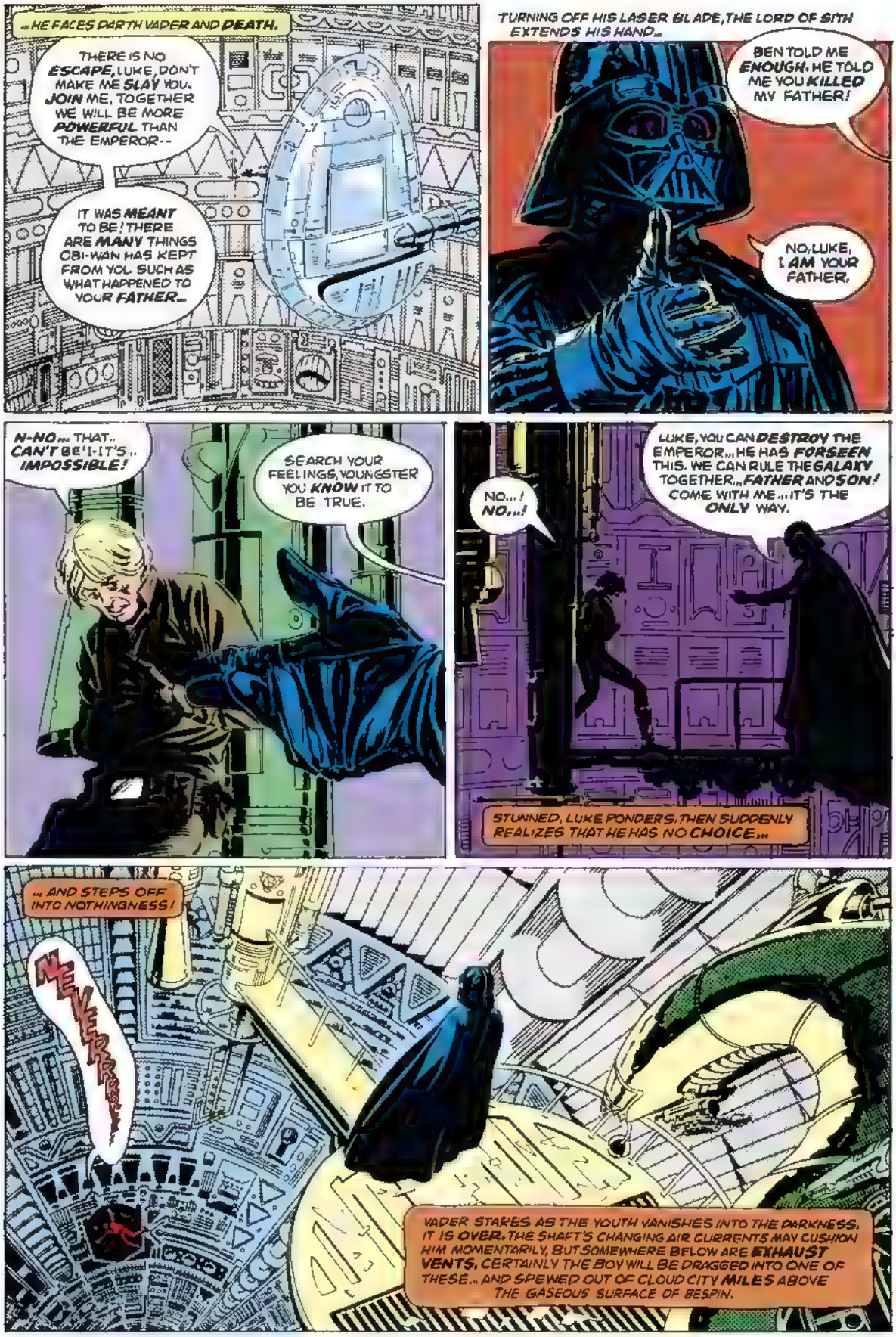

AND WHAT THE TRANSLATOR DROID'S PHOTORECEPTORS SOON BEHOLD IS THE STORMTROOPERS BEING DISARMED...
PUT THIS BUNCH IN THE SECURITY TOWER... QUIETLY. NO ONE MUST KNOW.
WHAT'S GOING ON..?
LET'S SAY I'M TRYING TO CORRECT A BIG MISTAKE. COME ON... WE'RE GETTING OUT OF HERE.
LANDO, AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO HAN, I WOULDN'T TRUST YOU TO--
LEIA DOESN'T FINISH, BECAUSE SUDDENLY...
...CHEWBACCA IS EXPRESSING THE SAME FEELINGS MORE STRONGLY!
NRAWWWK!
I-I.. HAD NO CHOICE...! BUT... THERE'S STILL A CHANCE TO.. SAVE HAN... BOBA FETT'S SHIP... IS AT.. EAST PLATFORM...!
CHEWIE! LET HIM GO!
BUT KEEP YOUR EYES ON HIM EVERY STEP OF THE WAY!
I'VE A FEELING I'M MAKING ANOTHER BIG MISTAKE...
NONETHELESS, LANDO CALRISSIAN IS SOON ON HIS FEET...
...LEADING A DESPERATE RACE TOWARD CLOUD CITY'S LANDING AREA. AND THAT RACE LEADS THEM PAST...
ARTOO! THIS WAY... HURRY!
VREETA BLIIT WA-DOOOT!
I KNOW... I KNOW. BUT MASTER LUKE CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF... AT LEAST UNTIL WE CAN RESCUE CAPTAIN SOLO FROM THE BOUNTY HUNTER!

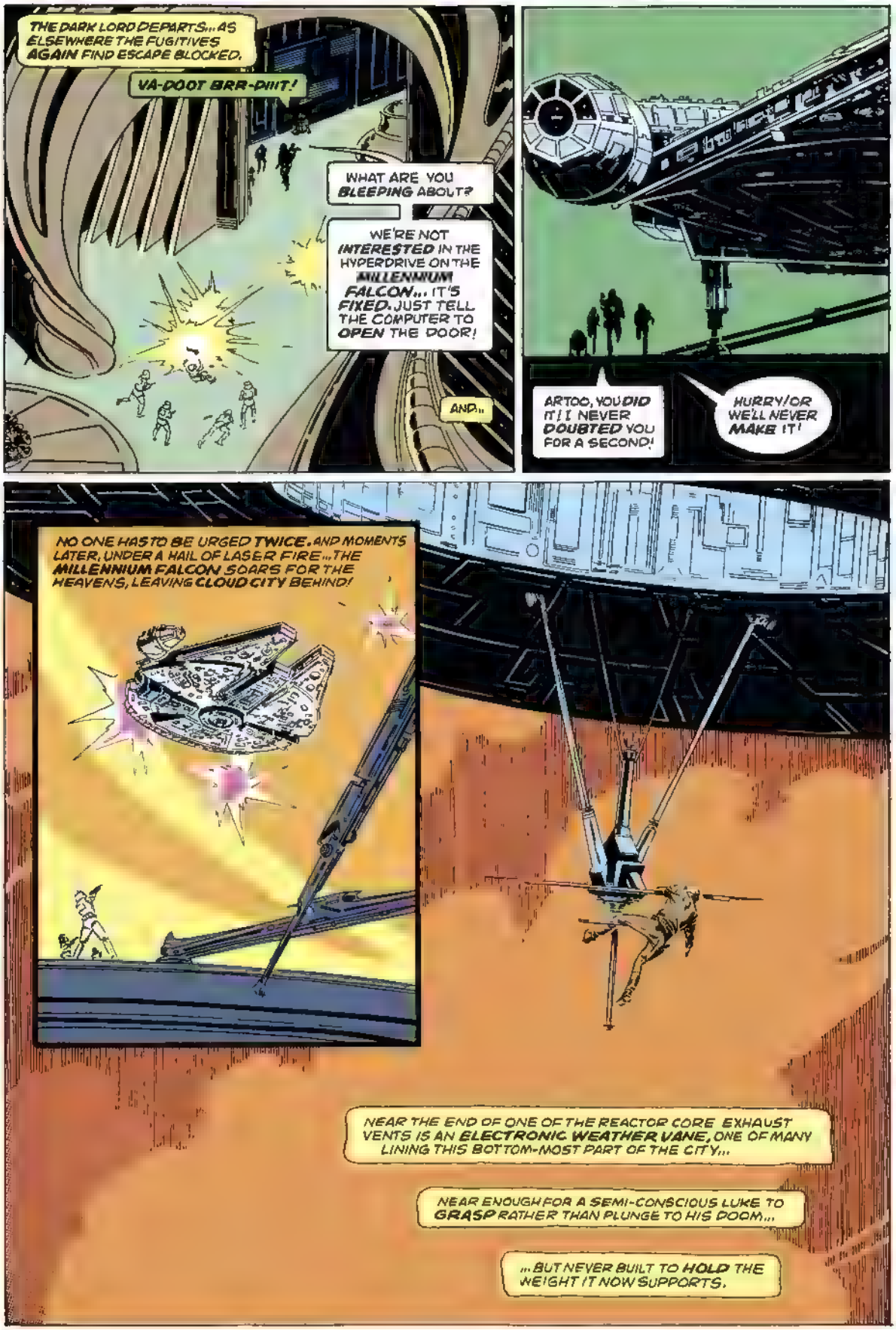
BUT WHEN THE GROUP BURSTS FROM THE EASTERN PLATFORM ELEVATOR... IT IS TO SEE BOBA FETT'S SLAVE I TAKING TO THE AIR!
AND A FRANTIC BARRAGE OF BLASTER FIRE CAN'T STOP IT!
IT'S NO USE...THEY'RE OUT OF RANGE!
NO! NO!
AND THE EMPIRE ALLOWS NO TIME TO MOURN THE LOSS OF HAN SOLO...
COME ON...! LET'S MOVE!
IT IS AS IF LANDO HAD NEVER SPOKEN. LEIA AND CHEWBACCA UNHEEDINGLY VENT THEIR FRUSTRATION AND ANGER AGAINST THE ADVANCING ENEMY.
LISTEN TO ME! IF WE REACH THE FALCON...WE CAN GO AFTER BOBA FETT!
THE WORDS REGISTER. THE PAIR WITHDRAW...
WHILE IN THE CARBON-FREEZING CHAMBER...LUKE SKYWALKER RELENTLESSLY ADVANCES!
THE FEAR DOES NOT REACH YOU... YOU'VE LEARNED MORE THAN I ANTICIPATED.
YOU'LL FIND I'M FULL OF SURPRISES!
AND I, TOO!
A LIGHTNING FEINT AND SLASH MAKE LUKE DODGE BACKWARD...ONTO THE UNCERTAIN FOOTING OF THE PLATFORM STAIRS!

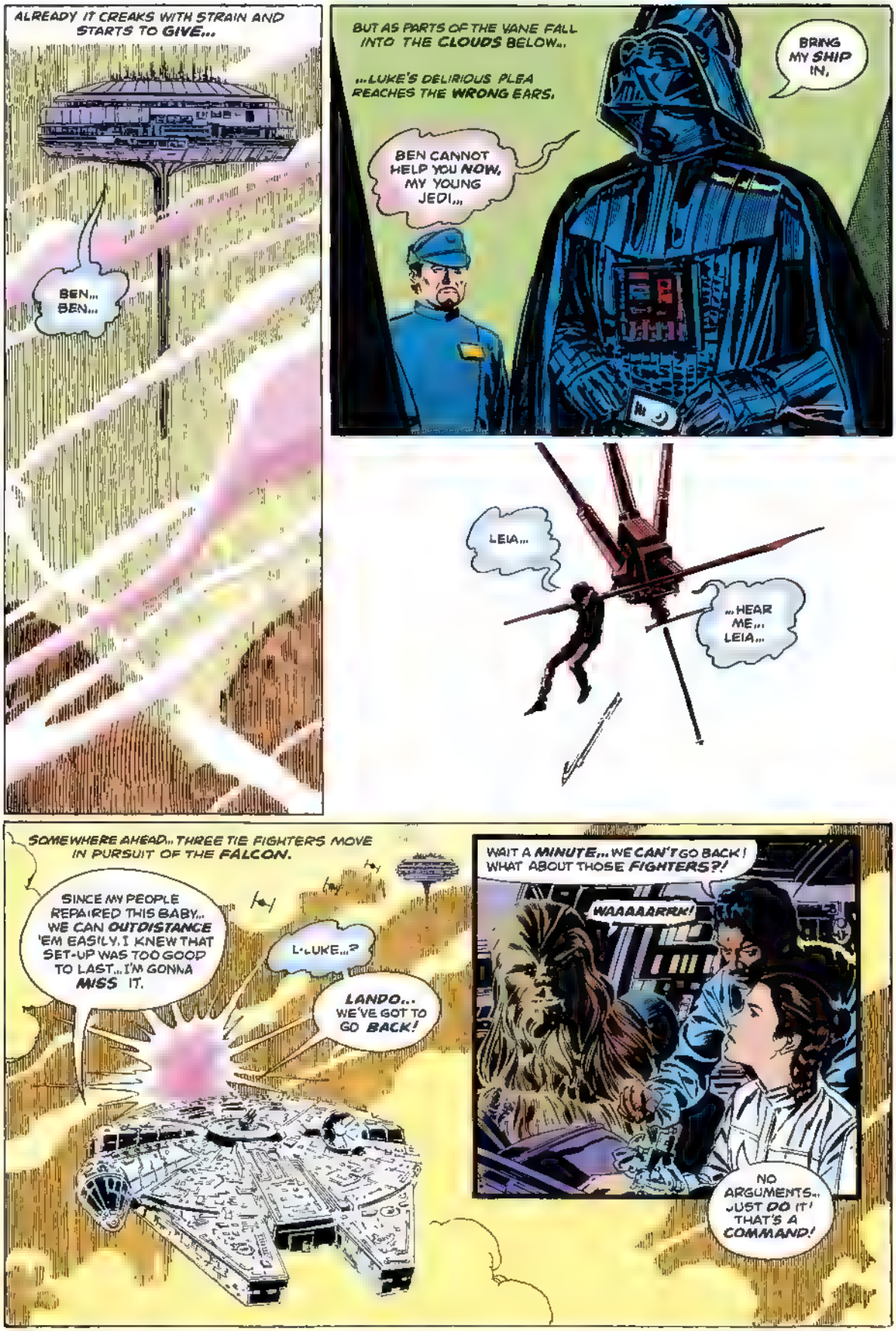
THE YOUNG WARRIOR LETS HIMSELF TUMBLE, ROLLING WITH THE FALL, READY TO COME UP FIGHTING...
...ONLY TO HAVE THE LORD OF THE SITH LAUNCH THROUGH THE AIR AFTER HIM LIKE SOME HUGE DARK BIRD!
YOUR FUTURE LIES WITH ME, SKYWALKER. NOW YOU WILL EMBRACE THE DARK SIDE... OBI-WAN KNEW THIS TO BE TRUE.
THERE IS MUCH HE DID NOT TELL YOU. COME... I WILL COMPLETE YOUR TRAINING.
NO! I'LL DIE FIRST!
WITH A LOUD DEADLY HISS... LIQUID METAL JETS FROM OVERHEAD! THE SAME CARBONITE THAT IMPRISONED HAN SOLO... NOW STREAMING ONTO THE SPOT WHERE LUKE HAS BEEN MANEUVERED!
ALL TOO EASY--
-- PERHAPS YOU ARE NOT AS STRONG AS THE EMPEROR FEARED.
TIME WILL TELL, LORD VADER... BUT I WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO LEAP THIS FAR.
OBI-WAN HAS TAUGHT YOU WELL. YOU'VE CONTROLLED YOUR FEAR... NOW RELEASE YOUR ANGER! I DESTROYED YOUR FAMILY... TAKE YOUR REVENGE!
LUKE DROPS AGILELY INTO THE RISING STEAM, READY TO ANSWER THE CHALLENGE... AND FINDS ONLY THE TAUNTING ECHO OF DARTH VADER'S VOICE.
YOUR HATRED CAN GIVE YOU THE POWER TO DESTROY ME, NOVICE... USE IT! USE IT!
YET EVEN AS HE MOVES IN PURSUIT, HE RECALLS ANOTHER VOICE... BEN'S...

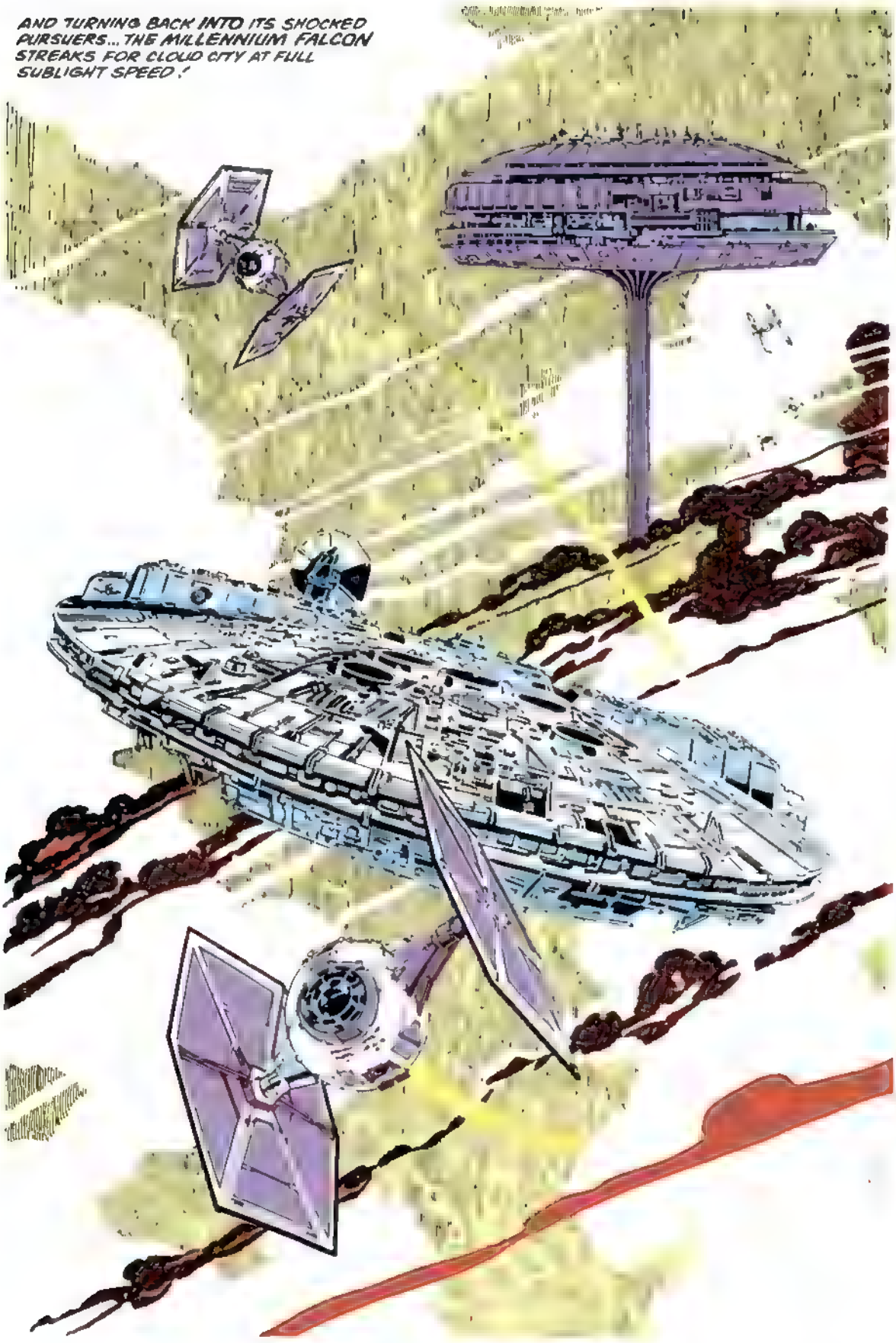

...CAUTIONING HIM NOT TO GIVE IN TO THE DARKER EMOTIONS. STILL, HE PRESSES ON... INTO ONE OF THE MINING OUTPOST'S REACTOR CONTROL ROOMS.
YOU'VE FOUND ME... NOW ATTACK, DESTROY ME! ONLY BY TAKING YOUR REVENGE CAN YOU SAVE YOURSELF!
FOR A MOMENT, LUKE IS CONFUSED, UNCERTAIN. THEN HE MOVES TO STRIKE...
...AND THE ROOM EXPLODES! MACHINERY RIPS FREE AND HURTLES AT HIM, POWERED BY THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE!
IT'S USELESS TO RESIST. JOIN ME... OR JOIN OBI-WAN IN DEATH!
A SABER SLASH DISINTEGRATES ONE DEADLY MISSILE... THE FORCE DEFLECTS OTHERS. BUT EVENTUALLY, INEVITABLY...
...A HUGE CHUNK OF MACHINERY SMASHES THROUGH LUKE'S GUARD!
THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS ABYSS OF CLOUD CITY'S REACTOR SHAFT YAWNS BENEATH HIM.
...UNTIL ONE HAND CATCHES HOLD OF THE CONTROL ROOM'S EXTERIOR WALKWAY!
BLEEDING, BATTERED... HE DANGLES, THEN AGONIZINGLY HE PULLS HIMSELF UP...
...TO FIND DARTH VADER ADVANCING, DRIVING HIM BACK ALONG THE WALKWAY... OUT ONTO THE REACTOR GANTRY.
WHY RESIST FURTHER...? YOU ARE BEATEN, LUKE. DON'T LET YOURSELF BE DESTROYED AS OBI-WAN DID!
CALM... MUST BE CALM.

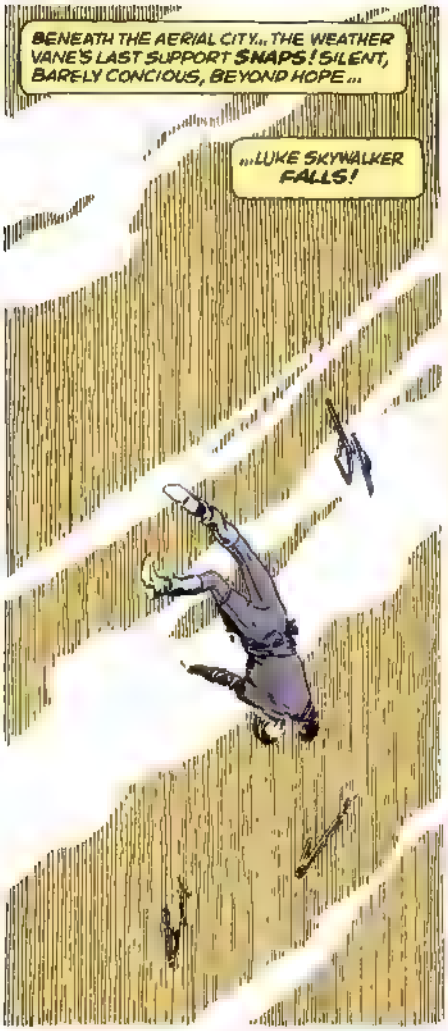
IN THE LANDING AREA, A DOOR NOW SEPARATES LEIA, LANDO, AND THE OTHERS FROM THE MILLENNIUM FALCON. A DOOR THAT IS SEALED...AS STORMTROOPERS CLOSE IN!
ARTOO! PLUG INTO THE CONTROL PANEL... YOU CAN OVERRIDE THE ALERT SYSTEM!
FRA-DWEEEEEEET!
WELL, NEXT TIME YOU PAY MORE ATTENTION! I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW POWER SOCKETS FROM COMPUTER FEEDS... I'M AN INTERPRETER!
ANYONE ELSE GOT ANY IDEAS?
THIS WAY! THERE MAY BE ANOTHER APPROACH TO THE FALCON. LEAST I GOT A CHANCE TO USE THE COMLINK BACK THERE--
--AND ALERTED EVERYONE ELSE TO EVACUATE BEFORE MORE IMPERIALS ARRIVE!
BACK AT THE REACTOR CORE, ABOVE THE SHAFT'S HOWLING WINDS, THE STEADY CLASH OF SABERS CAN BE HEARD... UNTIL THE DARK LORD'S BLADE COMES SLICING THROUGH PART OF THE GANTRY EQUIPMENT TO STRIKE LUKE'S SWORDARM!
PAIN SEIZES THE YOUNG WARRIOR! HIS WEAPON FALLS. THE HAND THAT GRASPED IT WILL NEVER GRASP ANYTHING AGAIN. AND CLINGING PRECARIOUSLY WITH HIS ONE GOOD HAND...

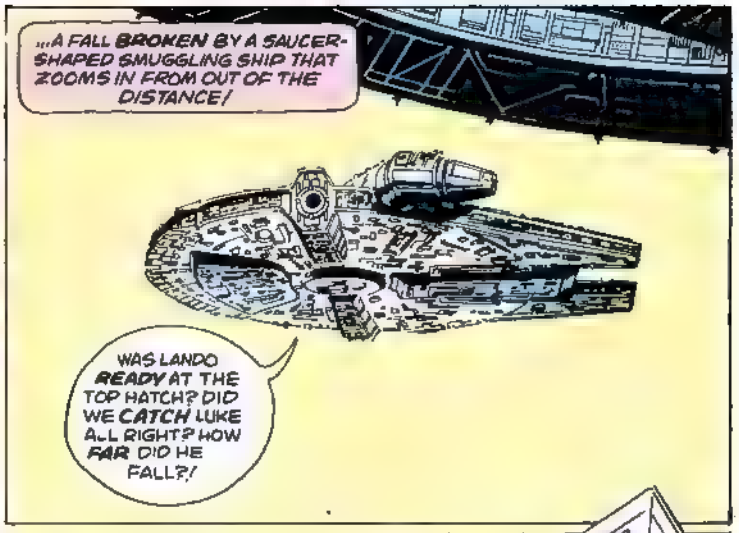

...HE FACES DARTH VADER AND DEATH.
THERE IS NO ESCAPE, LUKE, DON'T MAKE ME SLAY YOU. JOIN ME, TOGETHER WE WILL BE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE EMPEROR--
IT WAS MEANT TO BE! THERE ARE MANY THINGS OBI-WAN HAS KEPT FROM YOU, SUCH AS WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FATHER...
TURNING OFF HIS LASER BLADE, THE LORD OF SITH EXTENDS HIS HAND...
BEN TOLD ME ENOUGH. HE TOLD ME YOU KILLED MY FATHER!
NO, LUKE, I AM YOUR FATHER.
N-NO... THAT.. CAN'T BE! I-IT'S.. IMPOSSIBLE!
SEARCH YOUR FEELINGS, YOUNGSTER YOU KNOW IT TO BE TRUE.
NO...! NO...!
LUKE, YOU CAN DESTROY THE EMPEROR... HE HAS FORSEEN THIS. WE CAN RULE THE GALAXY TOGETHER... FATHER AND SON! COME WITH ME... IT'S THE ONLY WAY.
STUNNED, LUKE PONDERS, THEN SUDDENLY REALIZES THAT HE HAS NO CHOICE...
...AND STEPS OFF INTO NOTHINGNESS!
NEVERRRR!
VADER STARES AS THE YOUTH VANISHES INTO THE DARKNESS. IT IS OVER. THE SHAFT'S CHANGING AIR CURRENTS MAY CUSHION HIM MOMENTARILY, BUT SOMEWHERE BELOW ARE EXHAUST VENTS, CERTAINLY THE BOY WILL BE DRAGGED INTO ONE OF THESE... AND SPEWED OUT OF CLOUD CITY MILES ABOVE THE GASEOUS SURFACE OF BESPIN.

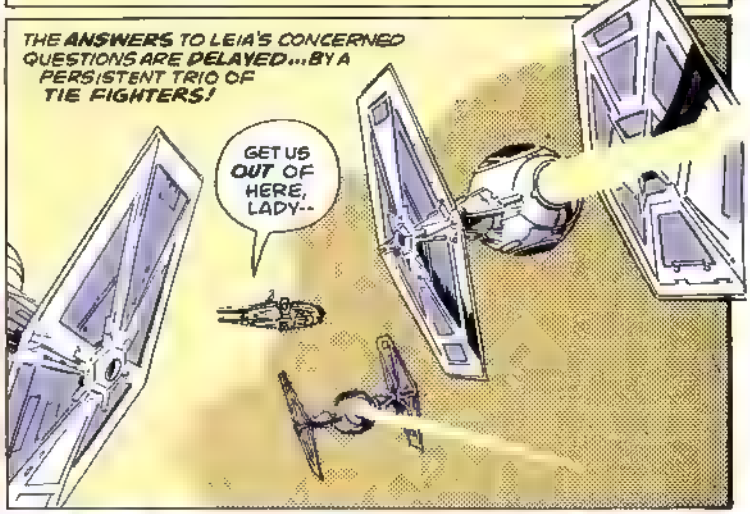

THE DARK LORD DEPARTS... AS ELSEWHERE THE FUGITIVES AGAIN FIND ESCAPE BLOCKED.
VA-DOOT BRR-DIIIT!
WHAT ARE YOU BLEEPING ABOUT?
WE'RE NOT INTERESTED IN THE HYPERDRIVE ON THE MILLENNIUM FALCON... IT'S FIXED. JUST TELL THE COMPUTER TO OPEN THE DOOR!
AND...
ARTOO, YOU DID IT! I NEVER DOUBTED YOU FOR A SECOND!
HURRY/OR WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT!
NO ONE HAS TO BE URGED TWICE. AND MOMENTS LATER, UNDER A HAIL OF LASER FIRE...THE MILLENNIUM FALCON SOARS FOR THE HEAVENS, LEAVING CLOUD CITY BEHIND!
NEAR THE END OF ONE OF THE REACTOR CORE EXHAUST VENTS IS AN ELECTRONIC WEATHER VANE, ONE OF MANY LINING THIS BOTTOM-MOST PART OF THE CITY...
NEAR ENOUGH FOR A SEMI-CONSCIOUS LUKE TO GRASP RATHER THAN PLUNGE TO HIS DOOM...
...BUT NEVER BUILT TO HOLD THE WEIGHT IT NOW SUPPORTS.


ALREADY IT CREAKS WITH STRAIN AND STARTS TO GIVE...
BEN... BEN...
BUT AS PARTS OF THE VANE FALL INTO THE CLOUDS BELOW...
...LUKE'S DELIRIOUS PLEA REACHES THE WRONG EARS.
BRING MY SHIP IN.
BEN CANNOT HELP YOU NOW, MY YOUNG JEDI...
LEIA...
...HEAR ME... LEIA...
SOMEWHERE AHEAD... THREE TIE FIGHTERS MOVE IN PURSUIT OF THE FALCON.
SINCE MY PEOPLE REPAIRED THIS BABY... WE CAN OUTDISTANCE 'EM EASILY. I KNEW THAT SET-UP WAS TOO GOOD TO LAST... I'M GONNA MISS IT.
L-LUKE...?
LANDO... WE'VE GOT TO GO BACK!
WAIT A MINUTE... WE CAN'T GO BACK! WHAT ABOUT THOSE FIGHTERS?!
WAAAAARRK!
NO ARGUMENTS... JUST DO IT! THAT'S A COMMAND!


AND TURNING BACK INTO ITS SHOCKED PURSUERS... THE MILLENNIUM FALCON STREAKS FOR CLOUD CITY AT FULL SUBLIGHT SPEED!

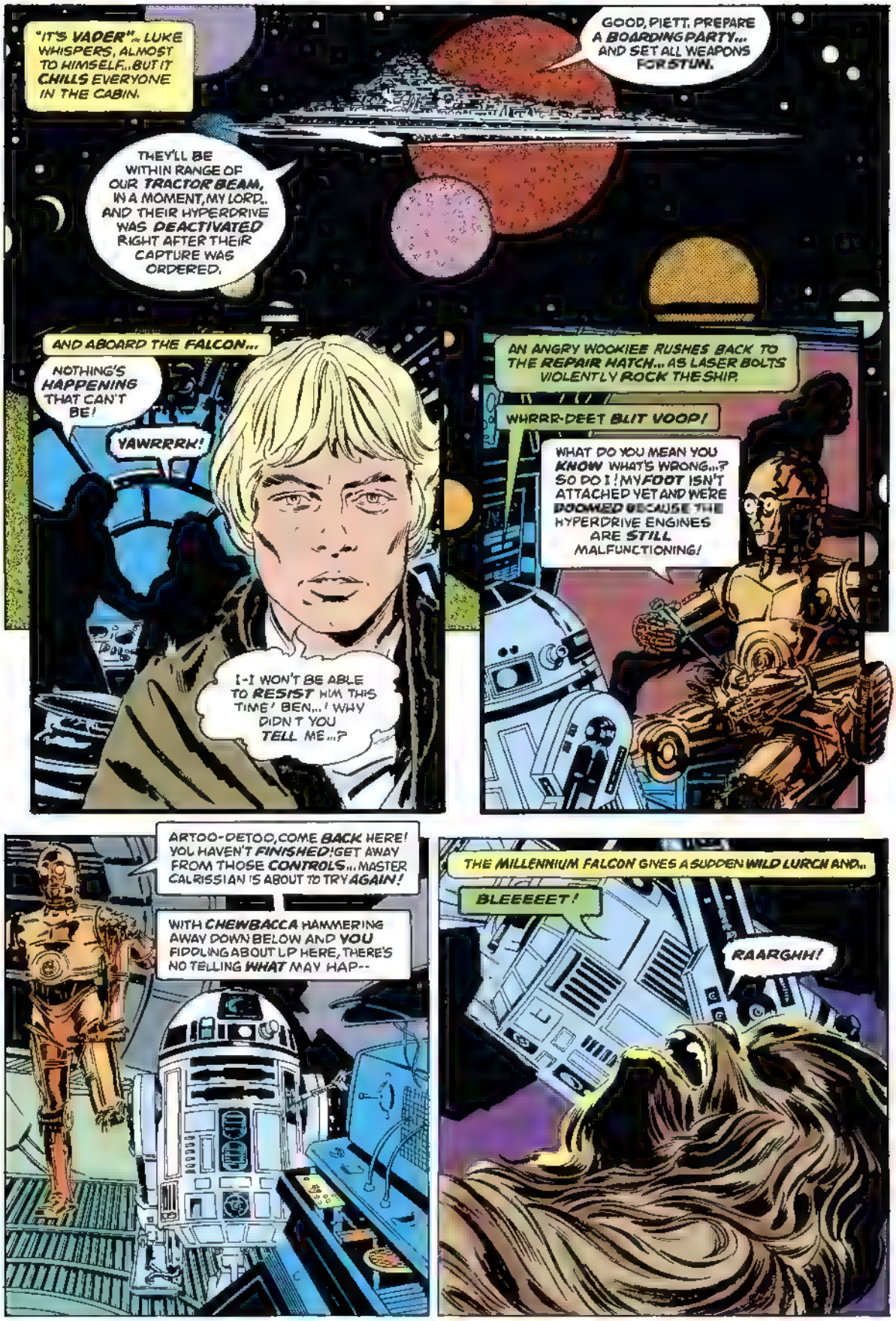

BENEATH THE AERIAL CITY... THE WEATHER VANE'S LAST SUPPORT SNAPS! SILENT, BARELY CONCIOUS, BEYOND HOPE...
...LUKE SKYWALKER FALLS!

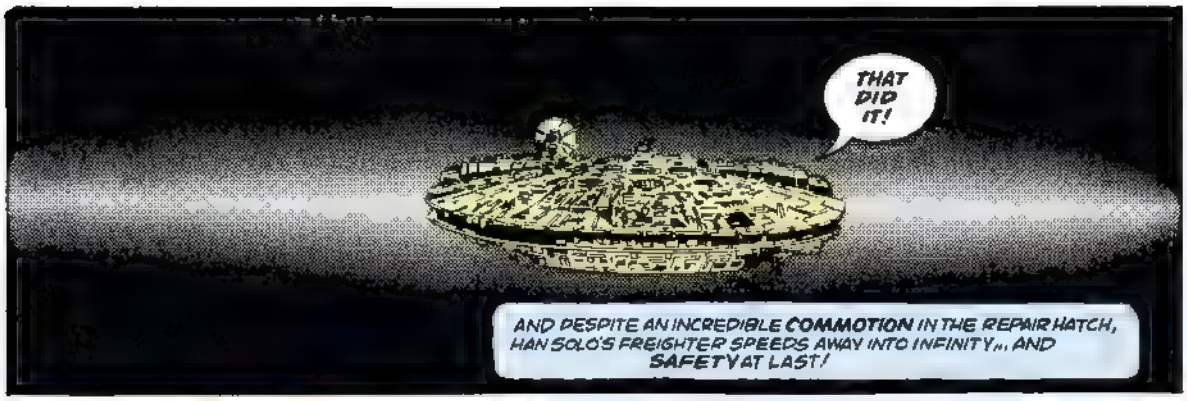

...A FALL BROKEN BY A SAUCER-SHAPED SMUGGLING SHIP THAT ZOOMS IN FROM OUT OF THE DISTANCE!
WAS LANDO READY AT THE TOP HATCH? DID WE CATCH LUKE ALL RIGHT? HOW FAR DID HE FALL?!

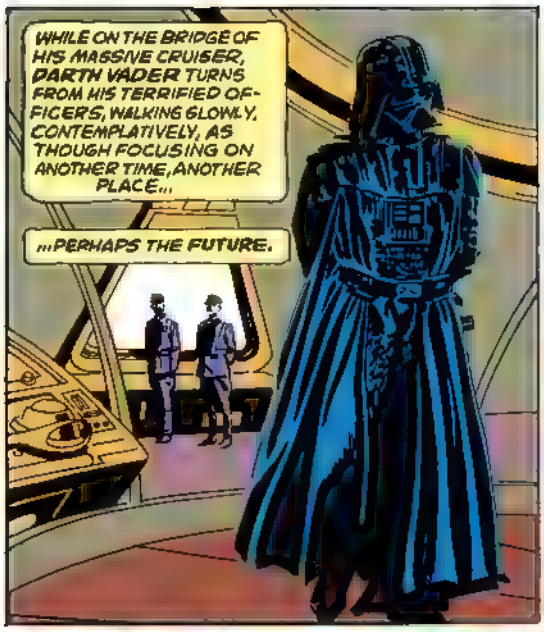

THE ANSWERS TO LEIA'S CONCERNED QUESTIONS ARE DELAYED... BY A PERSISTENT TRIO OF TIE FIGHTERS!
GET US OUT OF HERE, LADY--

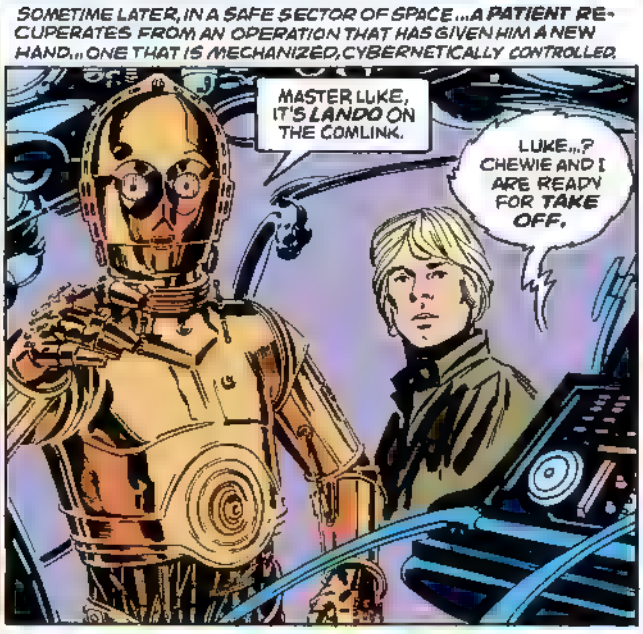
...AND I THINK YOUR FRIEND WILL SURVIVE!
THANK THE FORCE! BUT UNDER THIS POUNDING THE DEFLECTOR SHIELDS CAN'T HOLD UP--
WE WON'T HAVE ROOM FOR ANY MISTAKES JUMPING TO HYPERSPACE

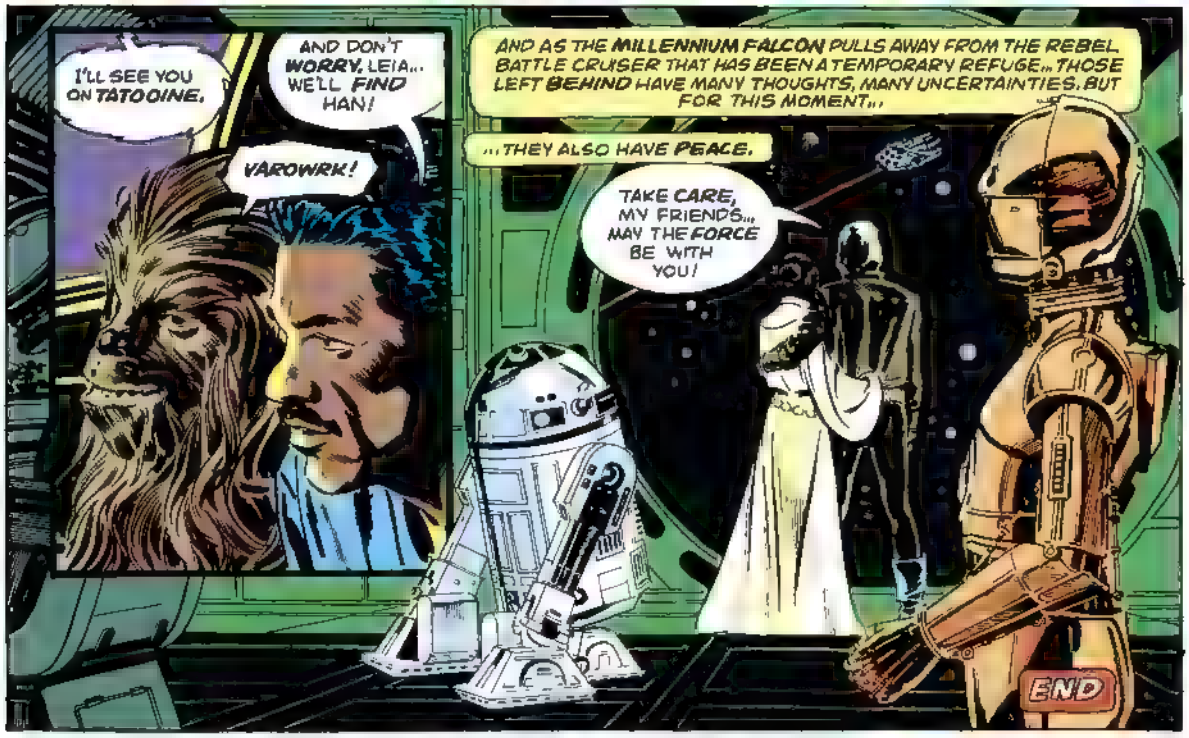
IF MY CREW SAID IT WAS FIXED... IT'S FIXED, PRINCESS.
THAT SOUNDS A LITTLE TOO FAMILIAR, LANDO... ESPECIALLY SINCE ANOTHER SHIP, MUCH BIGGER, IS NOW TRYING TO CUT US OFF!

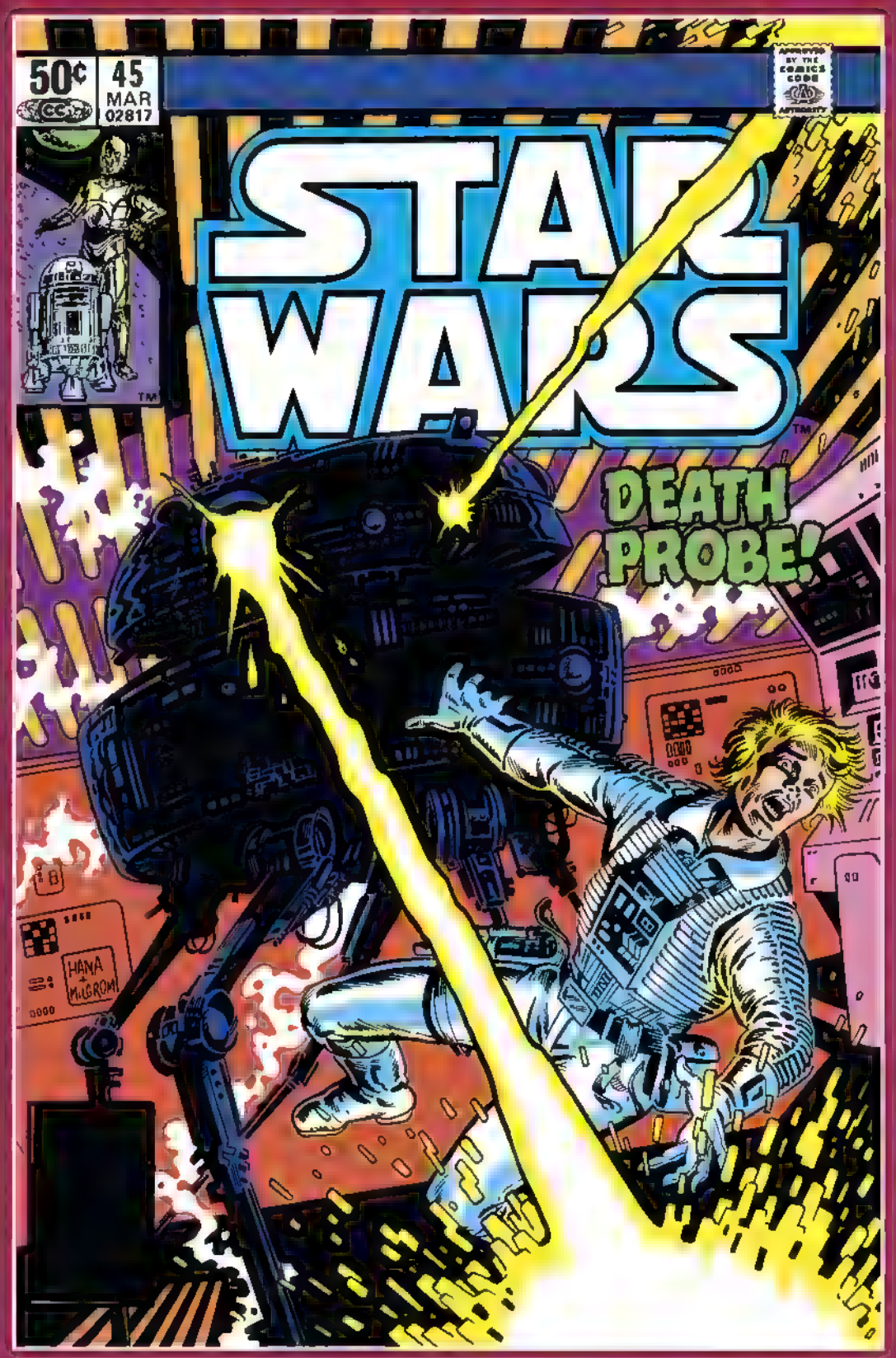

"IT'S VADER"... LUKE WHISPERS, ALMOST TO HIMSELF... BUT IT CHILLS EVERYONE IN THE CABIN.
GOOD, PIETT. PREPARE A BOARDING PARTY... AND SET ALL WEAPONS FOR STUN.
THEY'LL BE WITHIN RANGE OF OUR TRACTOR BEAM, IN A MOMENT, MY LORD.. AND THEIR HYPERDRIVE WAS DEACTIVATED RIGHT AFTER THEIR CAPTURE WAS ORDERED.
AND ABOARD THE FALCON...
NOTHING'S HAPPENING THAT CAN'T BE!
YAWRRRR!
I-I WON'T BE ABLE TO RESIST HIM THIS TIME! BEN...! WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME...?
AN ANGRY WOOKIEE RUSHES BACK TO THE REPAIR HATCH... AS LASER BOLTS VIOLENTLY ROCK THE SHIP.
WHRRR-DEET BLIT VOOP!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU KNOW WHAT'S WRONG...? SO DO I! MY FOOT ISN'T ATTACHED YET AND WE'RE DOOMED BECAUSE THE HYPERDRIVE ENGINES ARE STILL MALFUNCTIONING!
ARTOO-DETOO, COME BACK HERE! YOU HAVEN'T FINISHED! GET AWAY FROM THOSE CONTROLS... MASTER CALRISSIAN IS ABOUT TO TRY AGAIN!
WITH CHEWBACCA HAMMERING AWAY DOWN BELOW AND YOU FIDDLING ABOUT UP HERE, THERE'S NO TELLING WHAT MAY HAP--
THE MILLENNIUM FALCON GIVES A SUDDEN WILD LURCH AND..
BLEEEEET!
RAARGHH!


THAT DID IT!
AND DESPITE AN INCREDIBLE COMMOTION IN THE REPAIR HATCH, HAN SOLO'S FREIGHTER SPEEDS AWAY INTO INFINITY... AND SAFETY AT LAST!


WHILE ON THE BRIDGE OF HIS MASSIVE CRUISER, DARTH VADER TURNS FROM HIS TERRIFIED OFFICERS, WALKING SLOWLY, CONTEMPLATIVELY, AS THOUGH FOCUSING ON ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE...
...PERHAPS THE FUTURE.


SOMETIME LATER, IN A SAFE SECTOR OF SPACE...A PATIENT RECUPERATES FROM AN OPERATION THAT HAS GIVEN HIM A NEW HAND... ONE THAT IS MECHANIZED, CYBERNETICALLY CONTROLLED.
MASTER LUKE, IT'S LANDO ON THE COMLINK.
LUKE...? CHEWIE AND I ARE READY FOR TAKE OFF.


I'LL SEE YOU ON TATOOINE.
AND DON'T WORRY, LEIA... WE'LL FIND HAN!
YAROWRK!
AND AS THE MILLENNIUM FALCON PULLS AWAY FROM THE REBEL BATTLE CRUISER THAT HAS BEEN A TEMPORARY REFUGE... THOSE LEFT BEHIND HAVE MANY THOUGHTS, MANY UNCERTAINTIES. BUT FOR THIS MOMENT...
...THEY ALSO HAVE PEACE.
TAKE CARE, MY FRIENDS... MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU!
END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STAR WARS
DEATH PROBE!
HAHA + McGROM

Long ago in a galaxy far, far away. . .there exists a state of cosmic *civil war*. A brave alliance of *underground freedom fighters* has challenged the tyranny and oppression of the awesome *Galactic Empire*. This is their story!

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HARD TIMES IN THE GALAXY. SINCE THE FALL OF THEIR BASE ON THE ICE PLANET, HOTH, FORCES OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE FIND NEW, EVER MORE SINISTER THREATS FROM THE EMPIRE ON ALL FRONTS.

A BATTLE-DAMAGED BLOCKADE RUNNER LIMPS THROUGH DEEP SPACE, LONG RANGE SCANNERS INOPERATIVE, EACH EXHAUSTED CREW MEMBER PRAYING THEIR RETURN TO REBEL FLEET RENDEZ-VOUS WILL BE WITHOUT INCIDENT.

IT ALMOST IS.

DEATH PROBE

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BLASTED THING IS VEERING THIS WAY.

THAT RULES OUT A METEOR.

NO LIFE FORM READINGS, CAPTAIN... DEFINITELY NOT AN ENEMY SHIP.

BOOST THE SHIELDS ANYWAY. NO POINT TAKING CHANCES, WITH SCANNING ABILITY LIMITED, WE HAVEN'T STUDIED IT LONG AND--

SIR!

THAT THING'S NOT JUST COMING TOWARD US! I-IT'S ON A--

COLLISION COURSE!

THE FULL ENERGY SHIELDS COME UP JUST A FRACTION TOO LATE.

MEN DIE...

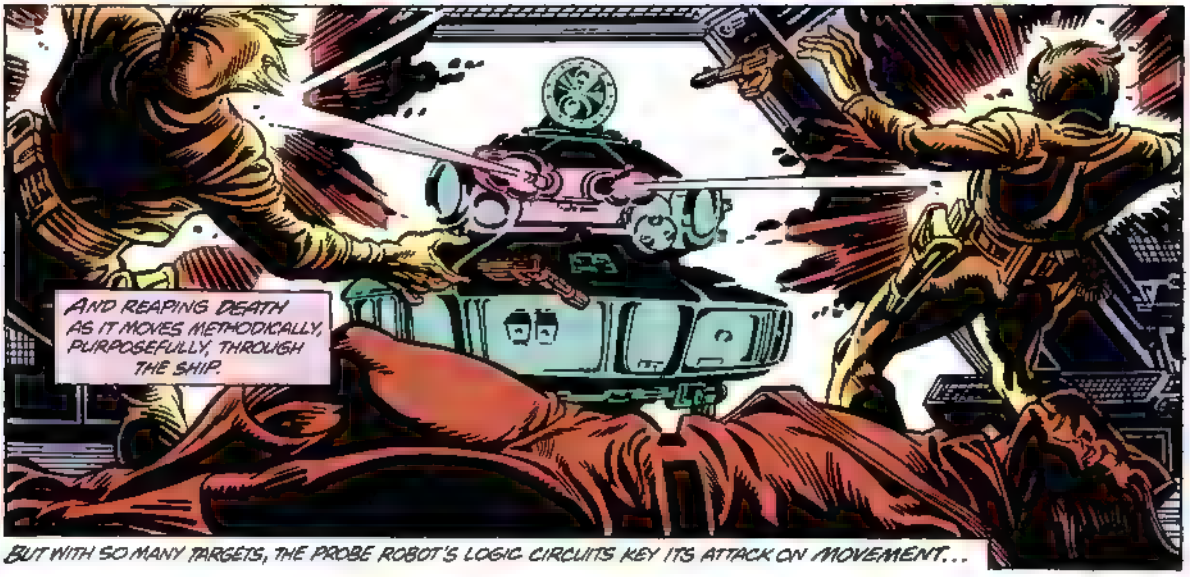
...SUCKED TO THEIR DOOM IN A SUDDEN RUSH OF ESCAPING ATMOSPHERE. AND EVEN AS THE DAMAGED COMPARTMENTS ARE SEALED OFF...

...THE DESTRUCTION IS ONLY BEGINNING! FOR WITH THE VIOLENT BURSTING ON AN INTERIOR BULKHEAD...

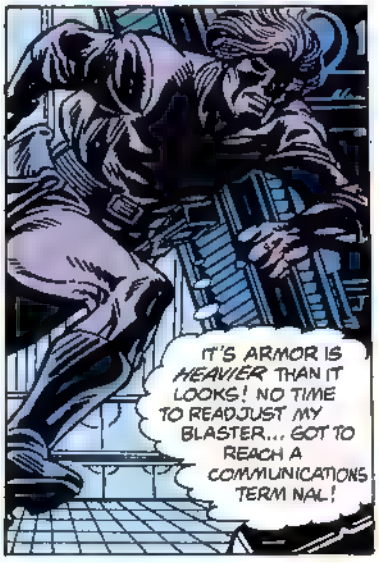
...THE TRUE NATURE OF WHAT HAS HIT THE REBEL VESSEL IS REVEALED!

AN IMPERIAL PROBE DROID!

B-BUT IT'S BIGGER... BETTER ARMED...! AND--

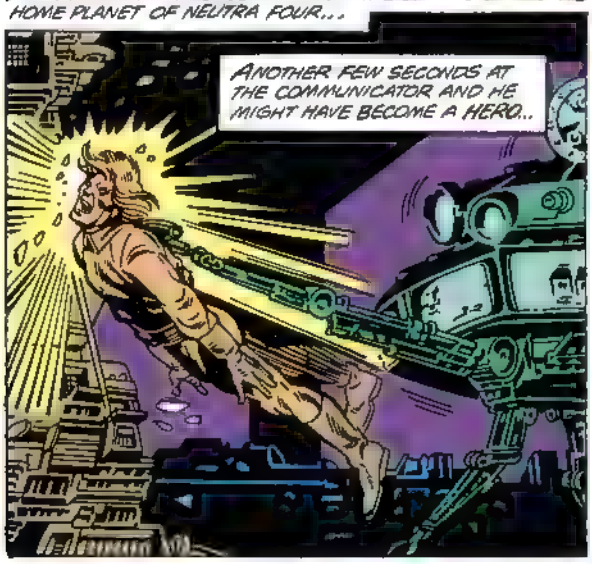


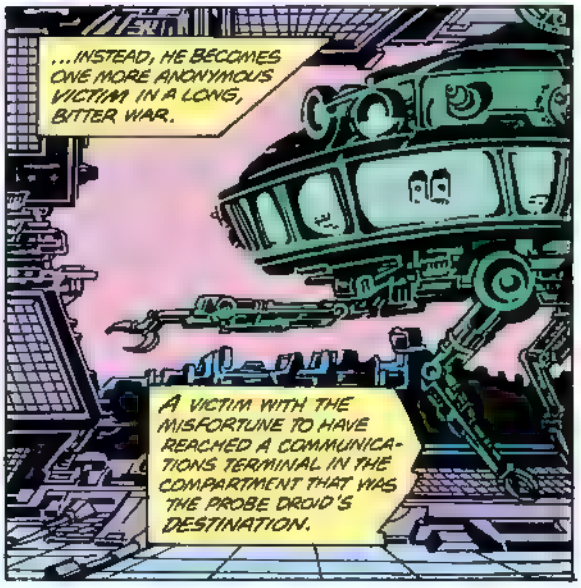
BUT WITH SO MANY TARGETS, THE PROBE ROBOT'S LOGIC CIRCUITS KEY ITS ATTACK ON MOVEMENT...



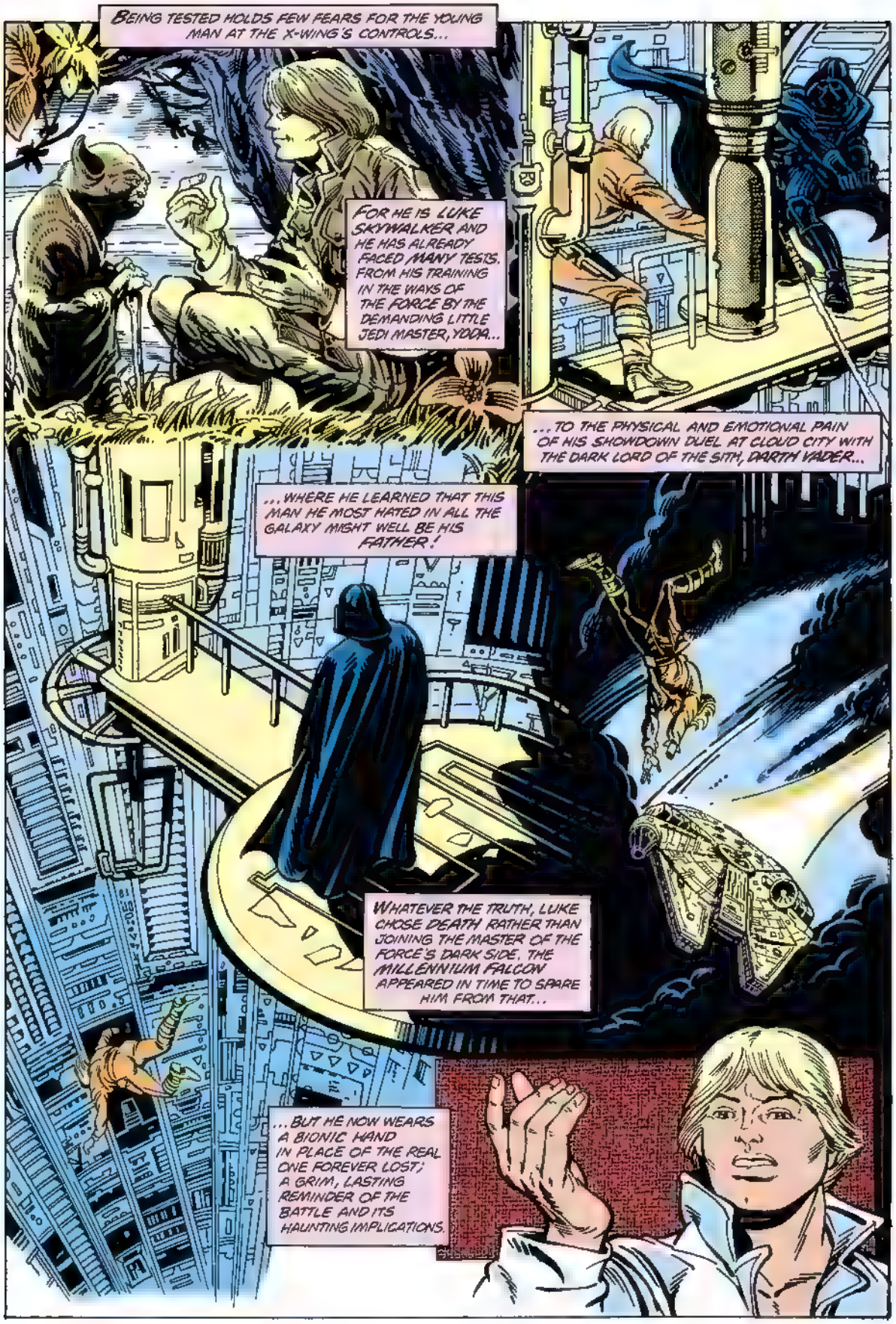
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE WE CAN CONTAIN THAT MECHANIZED MONSTER! THE FLEET HAS TO KNOW!
HE IS RAD TORLENT, ONE OF THE SHIP'S JUNIOR OFFICERS...

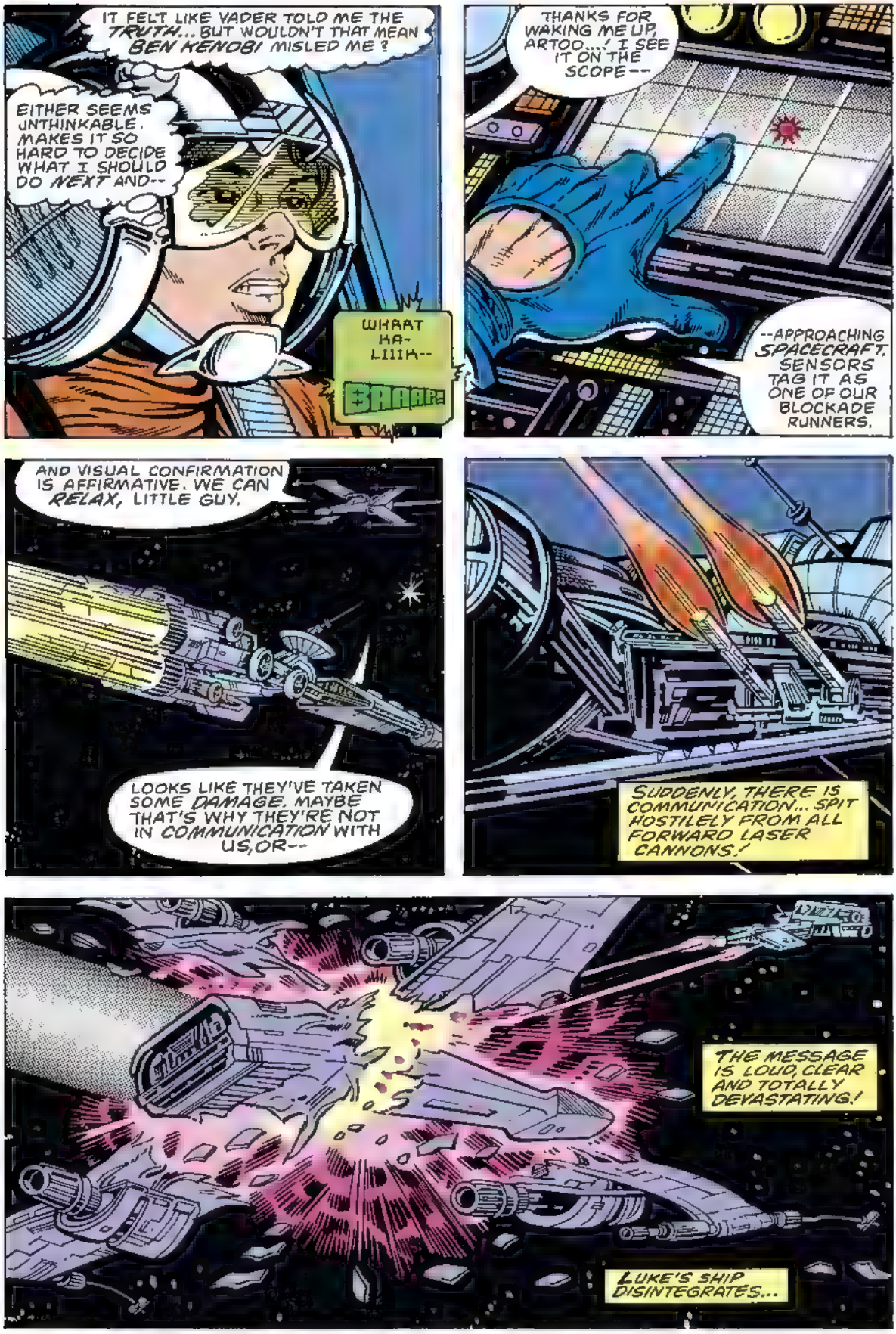
HE JOINED THE REBELLION WHEN THE EMPIRE SEIZED HIS HOME PLANET OF NEUTRA FOUR...

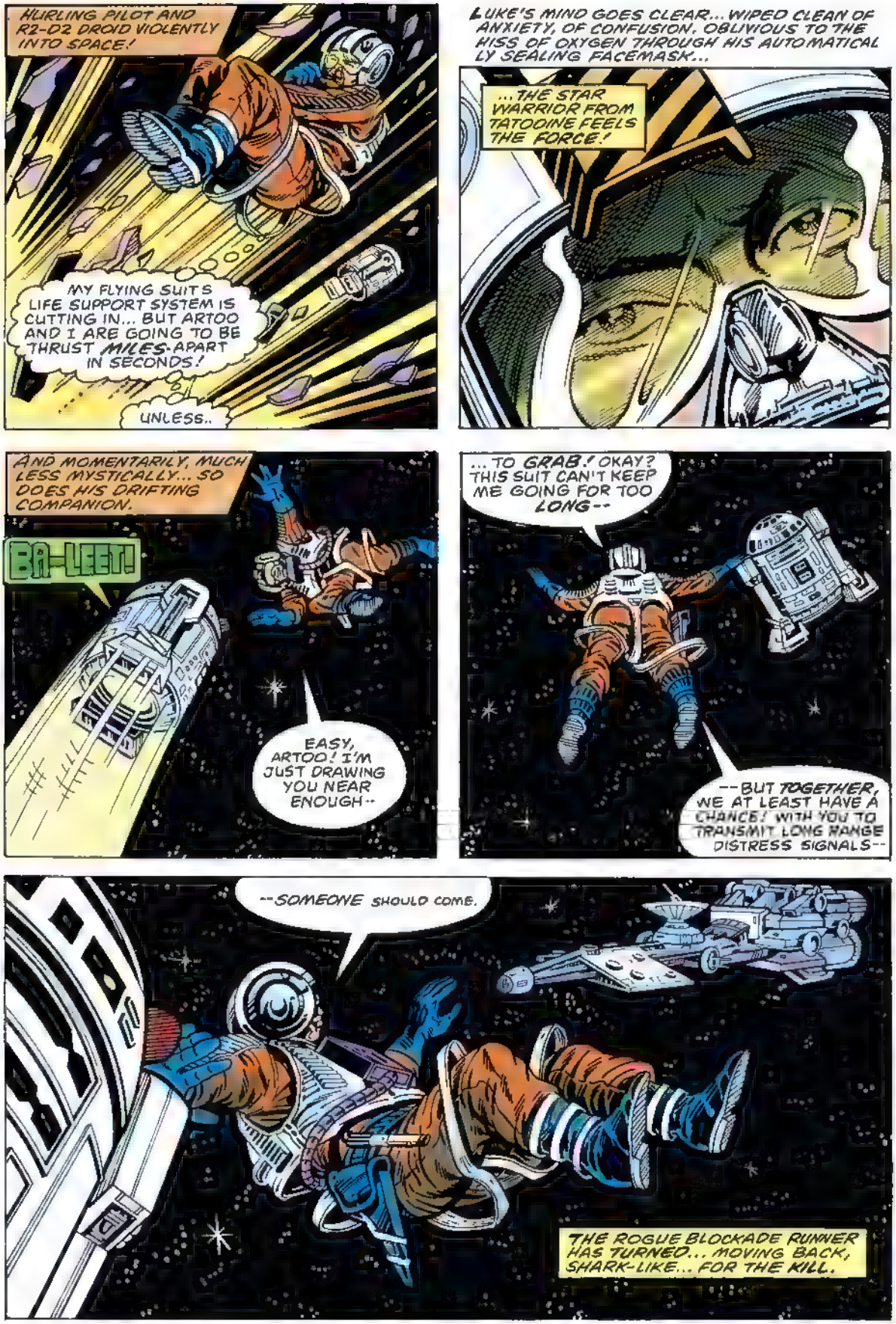


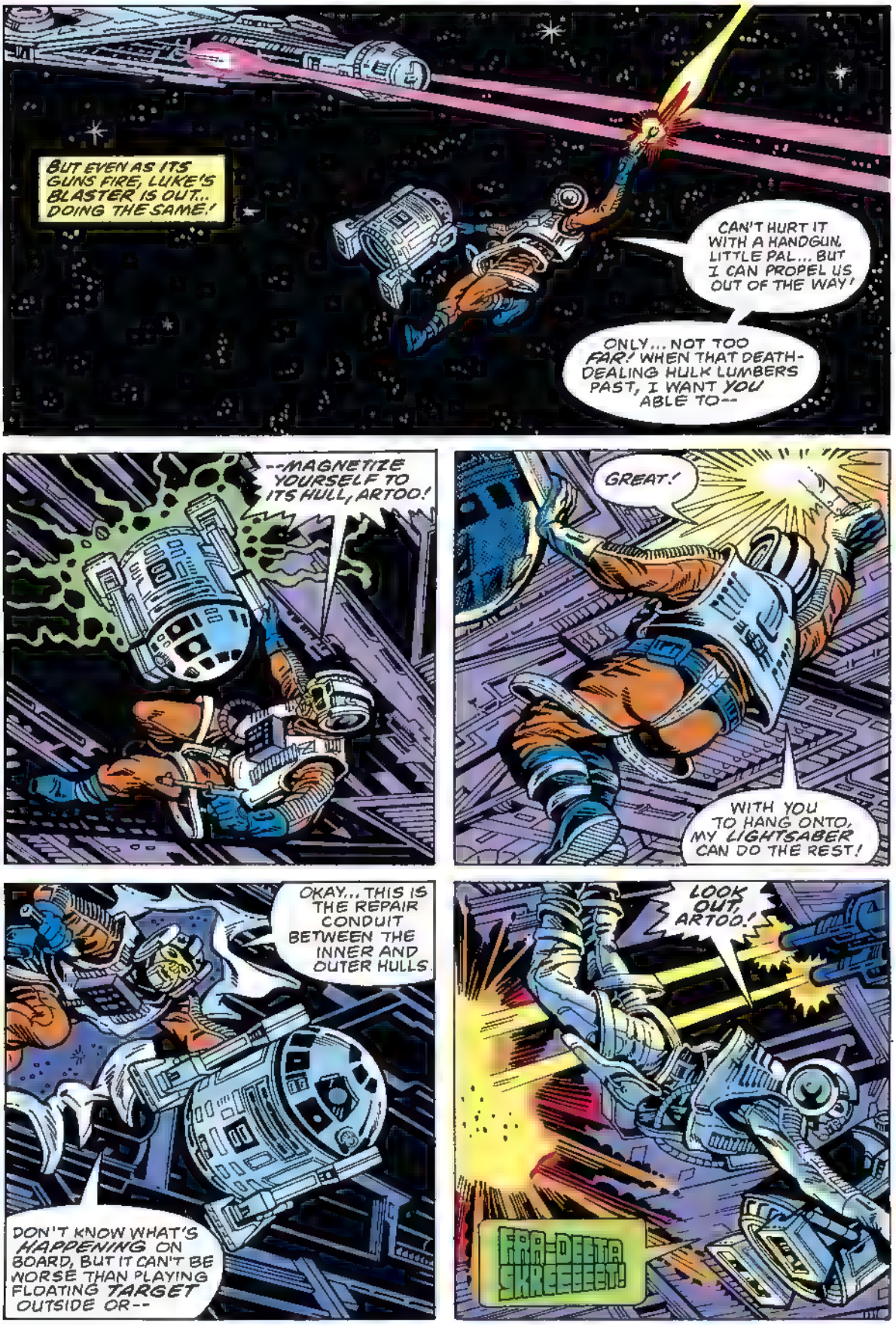

...INSTEAD, HE BECOMES ONE MORE ANONYMOUS VICTIM IN A LONG, BITTER WAR.
A VICTIM WITH THE MISFORTUNE TO HAVE REACHED A COMMUNICATIONS TERMINAL IN THE COMPARTMENT THAT WAS THE PROBE DROID'S DESTINATION.

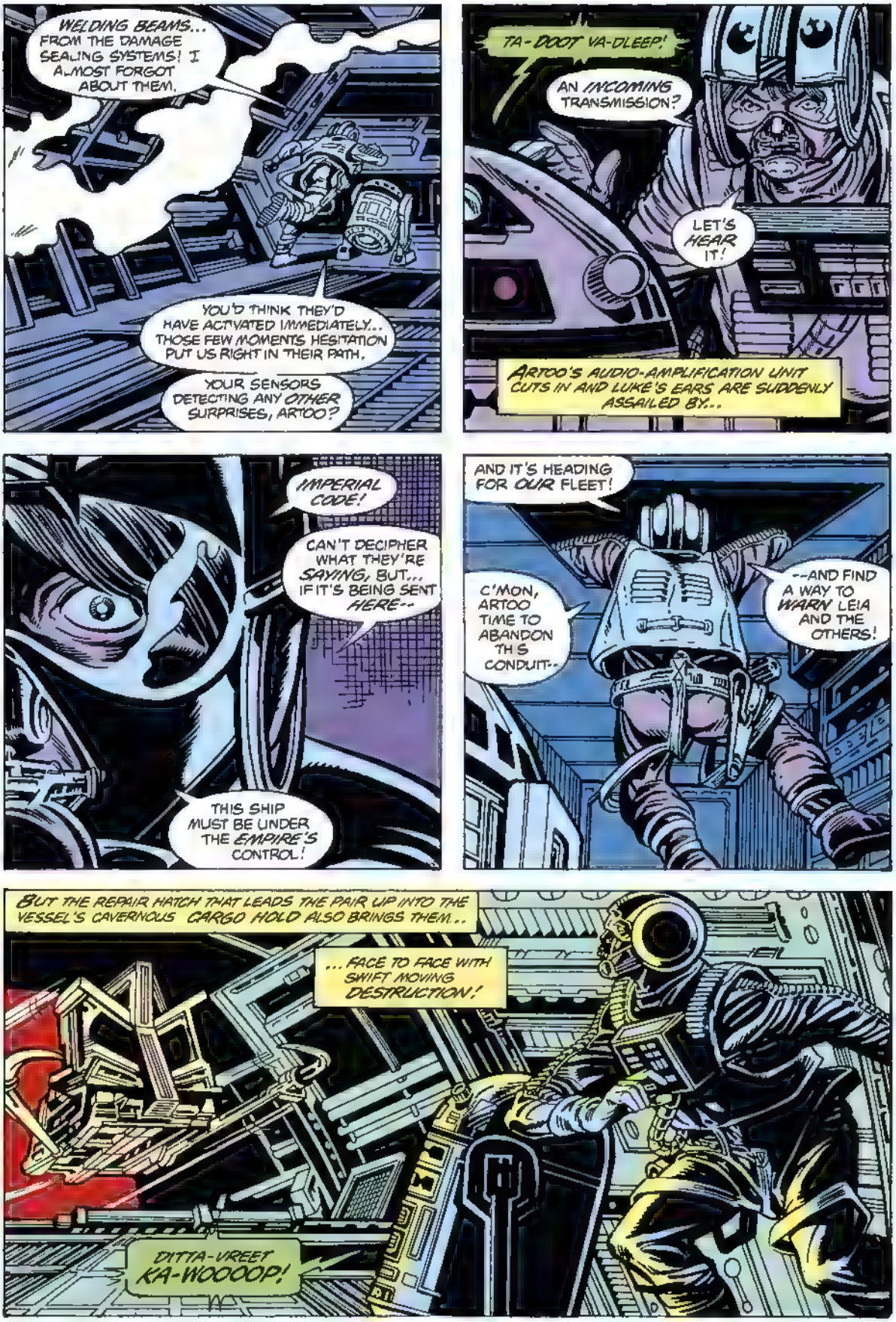
AND SEVERAL LIGHT YEARS AWAY... THAT ARRIVAL IS DULY NOTED.
IT'S PROBE 13-K, SIR. ONE OF THE MODELS YOU HAD SPECIALLY AUGMENTED BY TECHNOLOGICAL SECTION.
OF COURSE IT IS. I WOULDN'T HAVE EXCEEDED ORDERS BY TAMPERING WITH OUR PROBE UNLESS I WAS CERTAIN OF WORTHWHILE RESULTS.
HERE'S THE PRINT-OUT ON ITS PROGRESS, ADMIRAL.
SATISFACTORY. MOST SATISFACTORY. AND THOSE FOOL TECHNOS THOUGHT WE WERE PROGRAMMING IT BEYOND ITS CAPABILITIES.
THE REBELS WILL SOON KNOW THE FULLEST MEASURE OF THOSE CAPABILITIES--
--AND THE EMPEROR HIMSELF WILL PRAISE THE NAME OF ADMIRAL DAMON KRELL.
ELSEWHERE, AN INCOMING T-65 X-WING FIGHTER KNIFES THROUGH THE VOID ON WIDE PATROL FOR THE ALLIANCE FLEET...
VA-DITTA PA-FREET BWOOOP?
NO, ARTOO, I'M NOT PUSHING MYSELF TOO HARD. AFTER ALL, I TOOK THIS FLIGHT TO TEST HOW WELL I'M RECOVERING...

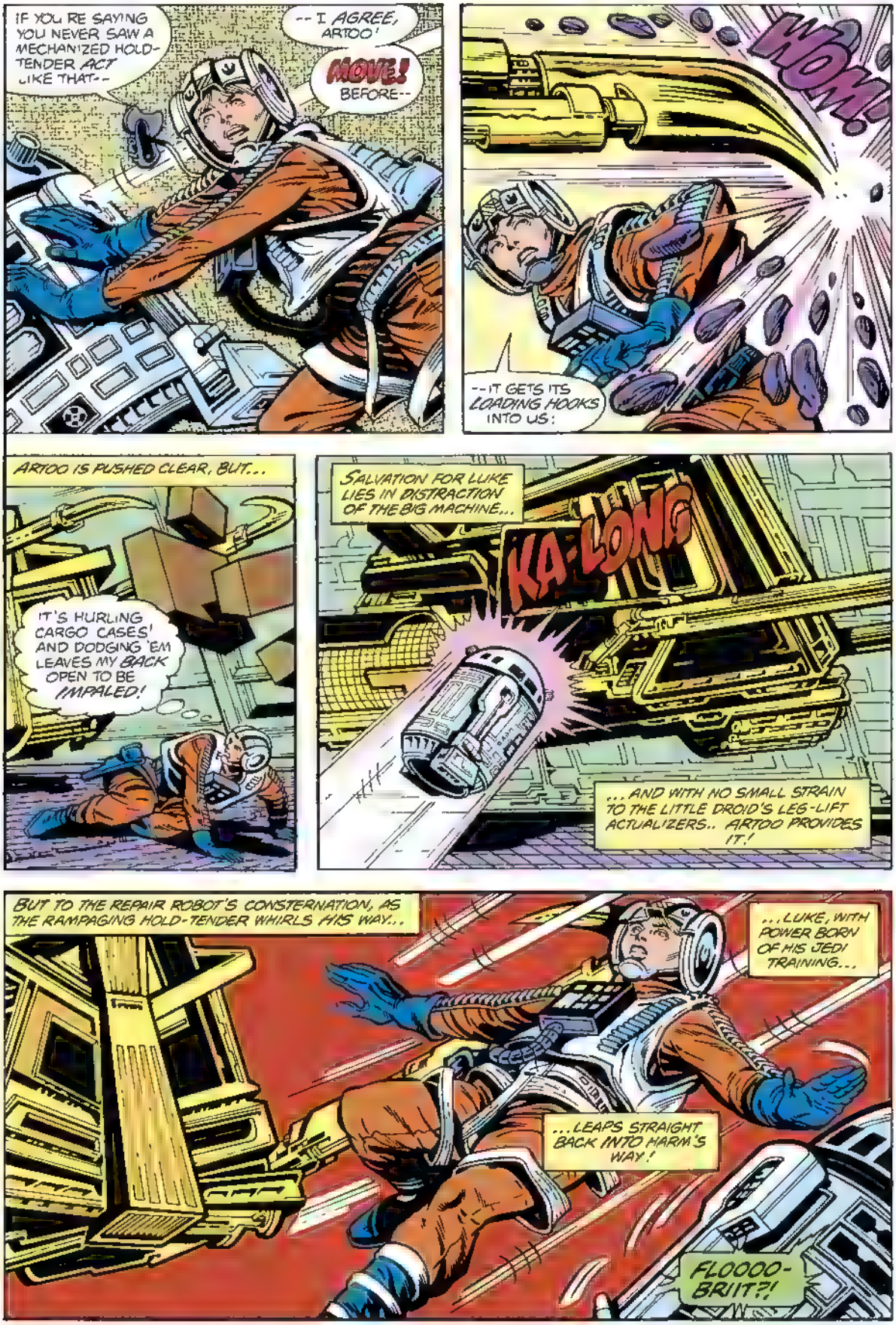

BEING TESTED HOLDS FEW FEARS FOR THE YOUNG MAN AT THE X-WING'S CONTROLS...
FOR HE IS LUKE SKYWALKER AND HE HAS ALREADY FACED MANY TESTS, FROM HIS TRAINING IN THE WAYS OF THE FORCE BY THE DEMANDING LITTLE JEDI MASTER, YODA...
...TO THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL PAIN OF HIS SHOWDOWN DUEL AT CLOUD CITY WITH THE DARK LORD OF THE SITH, DARTH VADER...
...WHERE HE LEARNED THAT THIS MAN HE MOST HATED IN ALL THE GALAXY MIGHT WELL BE HIS FATHER!
WHATEVER THE TRUTH, LUKE CHOSE DEATH RATHER THAN JOINING THE MASTER OF THE FORCE'S DARK SIDE. THE MILLENNIUM FALCON APPEARED IN TIME TO SPARE HIM FROM THAT...
...BUT HE NOW WEARS A BIONIC HAND IN PLACE OF THE REAL ONE FOREVER LOST; A GRIM, LASTING REMINDER OF THE BATTLE AND ITS HAUNTING IMPLICATIONS.

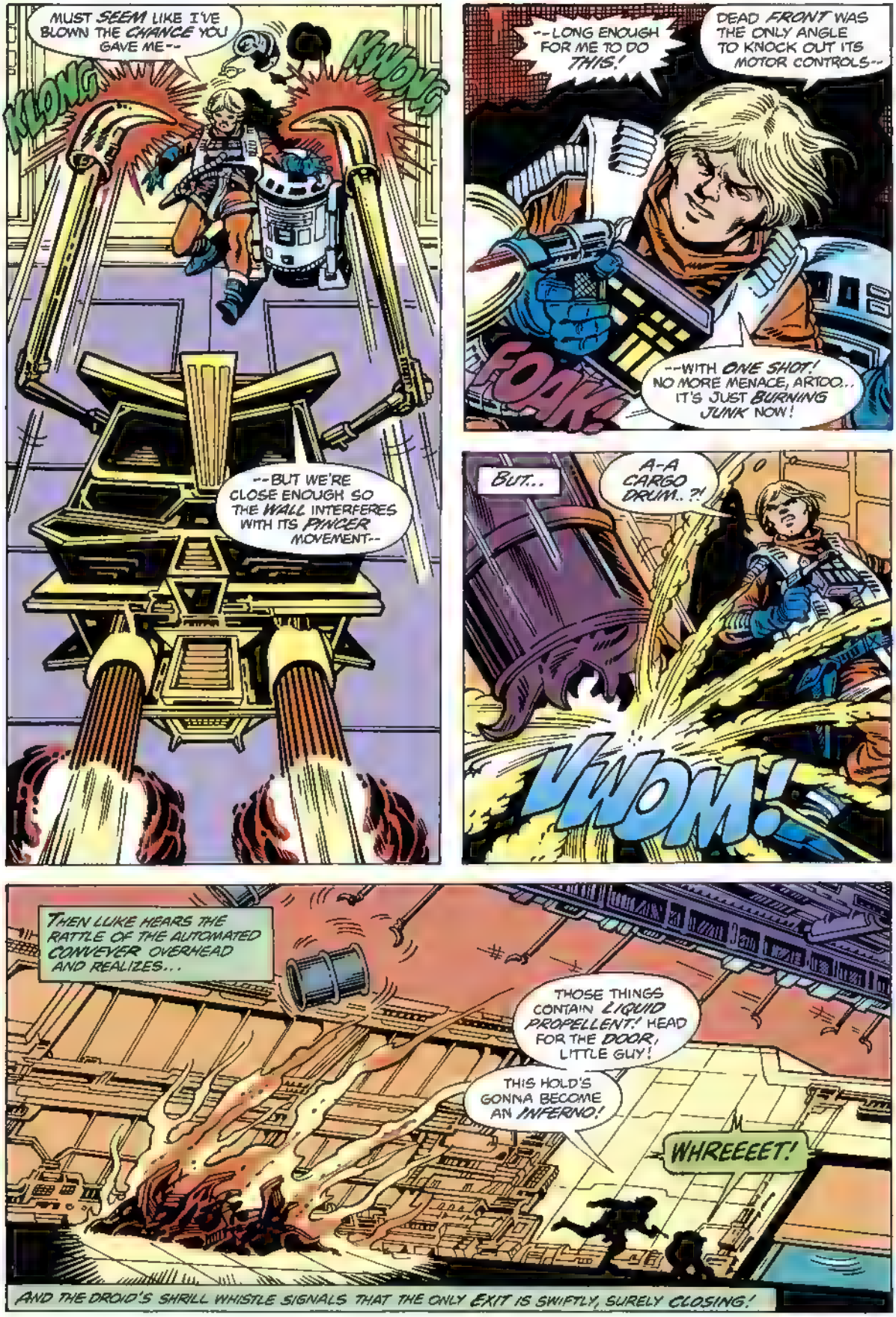

IT FELT LIKE VADER TOLD ME THE TRUTH... BUT WOULDN'T THAT MEAN BEN KENOBI MISLED ME?
EITHER SEEMS UNTHINKABLE. MAKES IT SO HARD TO DECIDE WHAT I SHOULD DO NEXT AND--
WHAAT HA- LLLIA--
BRAAP!
THANKS FOR WAKING ME UP, ARTOO...! I SEE IT ON THE SCOPE--
--APPROACHING SPACECRAFT. SENSORS TAG IT AS ONE OF OUR BLOCKADE RUNNERS.
AND VISUAL CONFIRMATION IS AFFIRMATIVE. WE CAN RELAX, LITTLE GUY.
LOOKS LIKE THEY'VE TAKEN SOME DAMAGE. MAYBE THAT'S WHY THEY'RE NOT IN COMMUNICATION WITH US, OR--
SUDDENLY, THERE IS COMMUNICATION... SPIT HOSTILELY FROM ALL FORWARD LASER CANNONS!
THE MESSAGE IS LOUD, CLEAR AND TOTALLY DEVASTATING!
LUKE'S SHIP DISINTEGRATES...

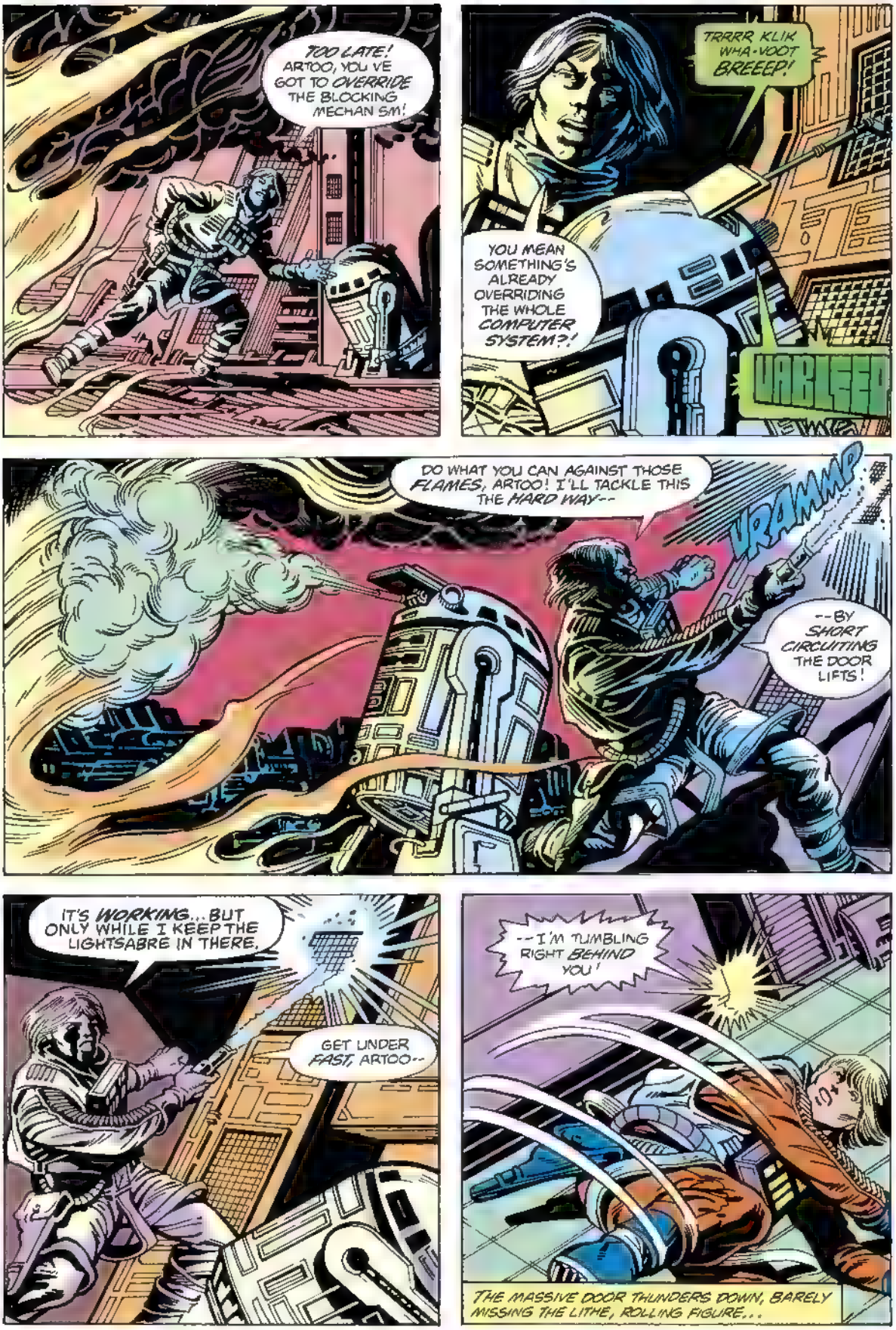

HURLING PILOT AND R2-D2 DROID VIOLENTLY INTO SPACE!
MY FLYING SUIT'S LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM IS CUTTING IN... BUT ARTOO AND I ARE GOING TO BE THRUST MILES APART IN SECONDS!
UNLESS..
LUKE'S MIND GOES CLEAR... WIPED CLEAN OF ANXIETY, OF CONFUSION. OBLIVIOUS TO THE HISS OF OXYGEN THROUGH HIS AUTOMATICALLY SEALING FACEMASK...
...THE STAR WARRIOR FROM TATOOINE FEELS THE FORCE!
AND MOMENTARILY, MUCH LESS MYSTICALLY... SO DOES HIS DRIFTING COMPANION.
BA-LEET!
EASY, ARTOO! I'M JUST DRAWING YOU NEAR ENOUGH--
...TO GRAB! OKAY? THIS SUIT CAN'T KEEP ME GOING FOR TOO LONG--
--BUT TOGETHER, WE AT LEAST HAVE A CHANCE! WITH YOU TO TRANSMIT LONG RANGE DISTRESS SIGNALS--
--SOMEONE SHOULD COME.
THE ROGUE BLOCKADE RUNNER HAS TURNED... MOVING BACK, SHARK-LIKE... FOR THE KILL.


BUT EVEN AS ITS GUNS FIRE, LUKE'S BLASTER IS OUT... DOING THE SAME!
CAN'T HURT IT WITH A HANDGUN, LITTLE PAL... BUT I CAN PROPEL US OUT OF THE WAY!
ONLY... NOT TOO FAR! WHEN THAT DEATH-DEALING HULK LUMBERS PAST, I WANT YOU ABLE TO--
--MAGNETIZE YOURSELF TO ITS HULL, ARTOO!
GREAT!
WITH YOU TO HANG ONTO, MY LIGHTSABER CAN DO THE REST!
OKAY... THIS IS THE REPAIR CONDUIT BETWEEN THE INNER AND OUTER HULLS.
DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING ON BOARD, BUT IT CAN'T BE WORSE THAN PLAYING FLOATING TARGET OUTSIDE OR--
LOOK OUT, ARTOO!
FRR-DEETA SKREEEEET!

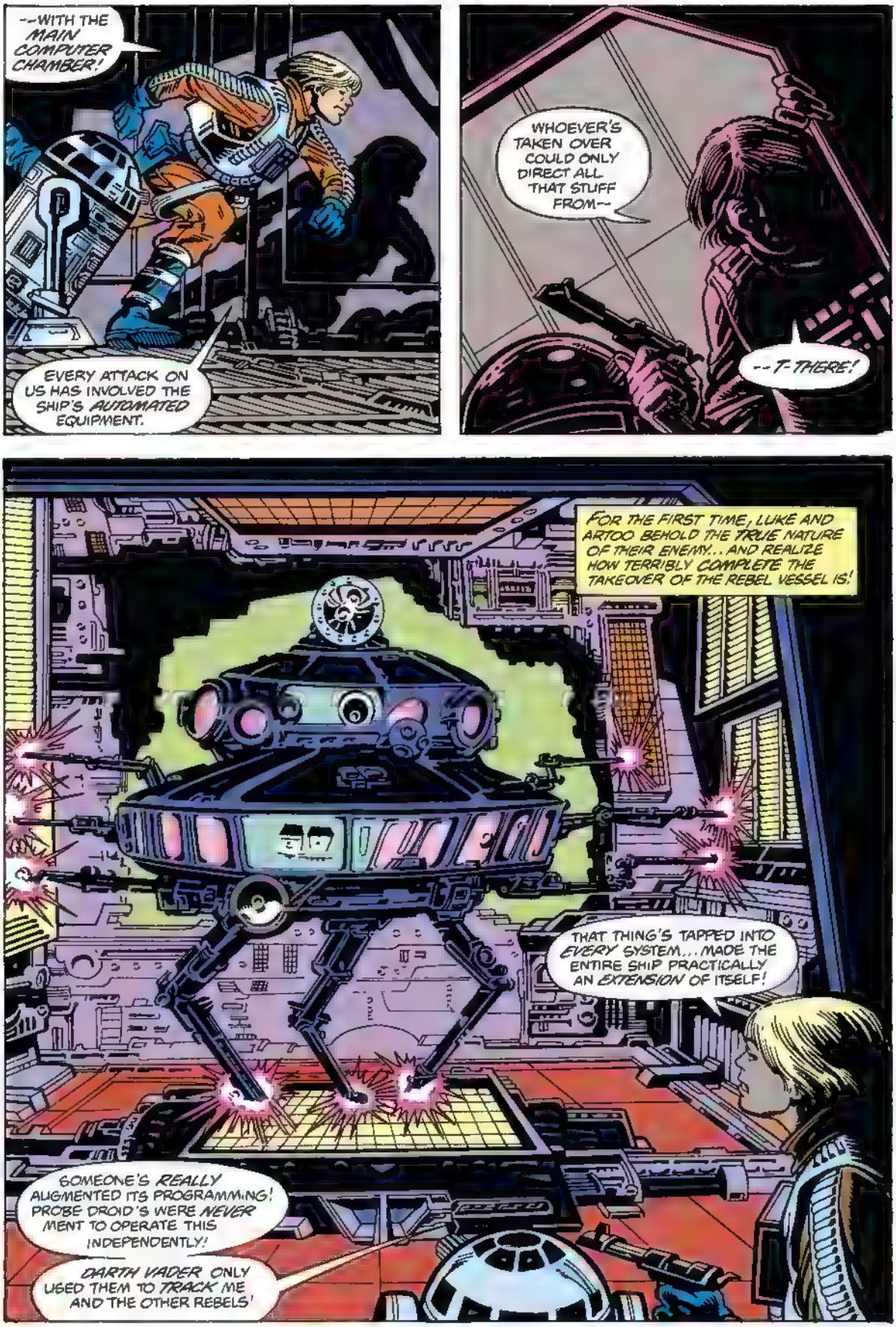

WELDING BEAMS... FROM THE DAMAGE SEALING SYSTEMS! I ALMOST FORGOT ABOUT THEM.
YOU'D THINK THEY'D HAVE ACTIVATED IMMEDIATELY.. THOSE FEW MOMENTS HESITATION PUT US RIGHT IN THEIR PATH.
YOUR SENSORS DETECTING ANY OTHER SURPRISES, ARTOO?
TA-DOOT VA-DLEEP!
AN INCOMING TRANSMISSION?
LET'S HEAR IT!
ARTOO'S AUDIO-AMPLIFICATION UNIT CUTS IN AND LUKE'S EARS ARE SUDDENLY ASSAILED BY..
IMPERIAL CODE!
CAN'T DECIPHER WHAT THEY'RE SAYING, BUT... IF IT'S BEING SENT HERE--
THIS SHIP MUST BE UNDER THE EMPIRE'S CONTROL!
AND IT'S HEADING FOR OUR FLEET!
C'MON, ARTOO TIME TO ABANDON TH S CONDUIT--
--AND FIND A WAY TO WARN LEIA AND THE OTHERS!
BUT THE REPAIR HATCH THAT LEADS THE PAIR UP INTO THE VESSEL'S CAVERNOUS CARGO HOLD ALSO BRINGS THEM...
... FACE TO FACE WITH SWIFT MOVING DESTRUCTION!
DITTA-VREET KA-WOOOOP!

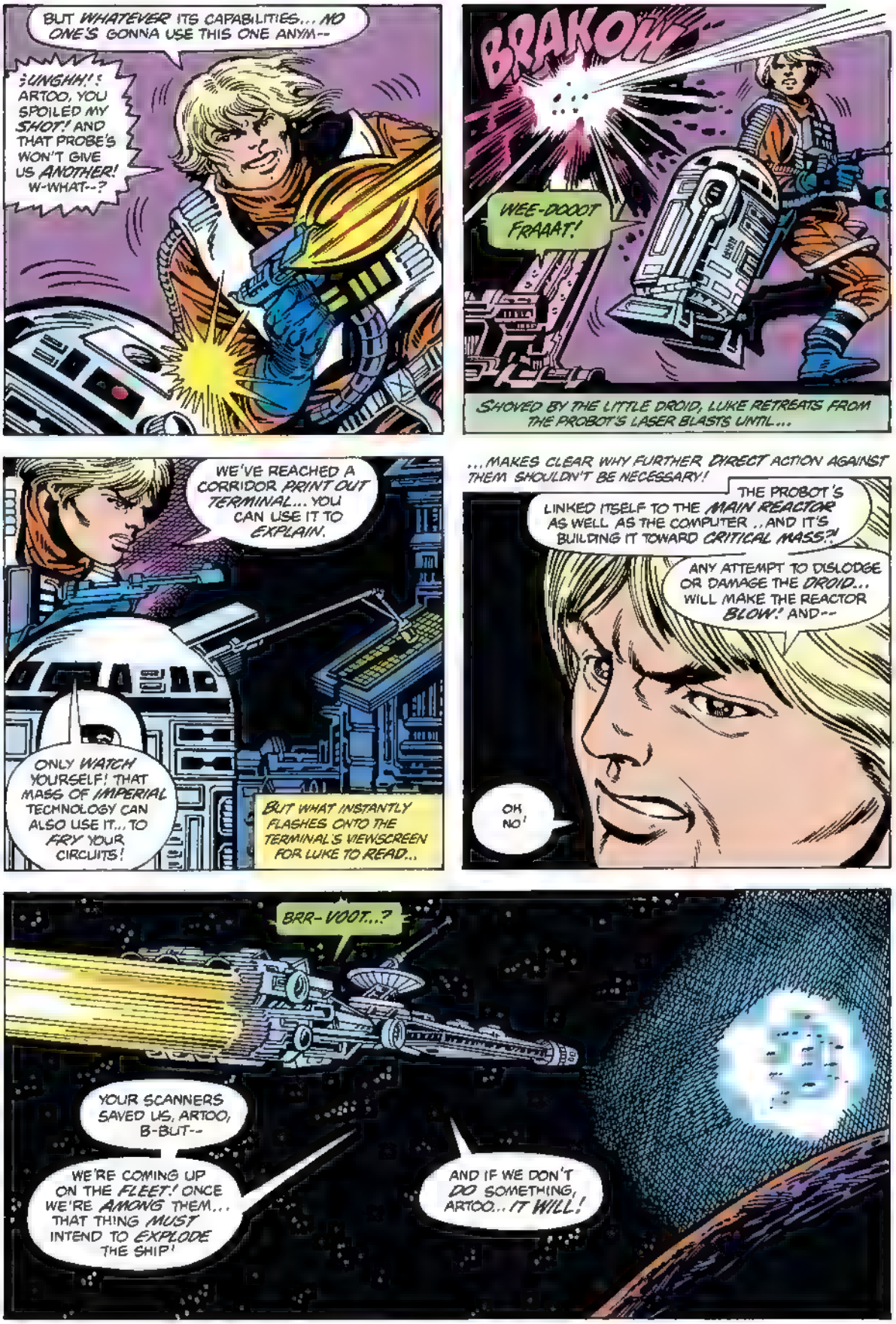

IF YOU RE SAYING YOU NEVER SAW A MECHANIZED HOLD-TENDER ACT LIKE THAT--
-- I AGREE, ARTOO!
MOVE! BEFORE--
WOW!
--IT GETS ITS LOADING HOOKS INTO US!
ARTOO IS PUSHED CLEAR, BUT...
IT'S HURLING CARGO CASES! AND DODGING 'EM LEAVES MY BACK OPEN TO BE IMPALED!
SALVATION FOR LUKE LIES IN DISTRACTION OF THE BIG MACHINE...
KA-LONG
...AND WITH NO SMALL STRAIN TO THE LITTLE DROID'S LEG-LIFT ACTUALIZERS.. ARTOO PROVIDES IT!
BUT TO THE REPAIR ROBOT'S CONSTERNATION, AS THE RAMPAGING HOLD-TENDER WHIRLS HIS WAY...
...LUKE, WITH POWER BORN OF HIS JEDI TRAINING...
...LEAPS STRAIGHT BACK INTO HARM'S WAY!
FLOOOO-BRIIT?!

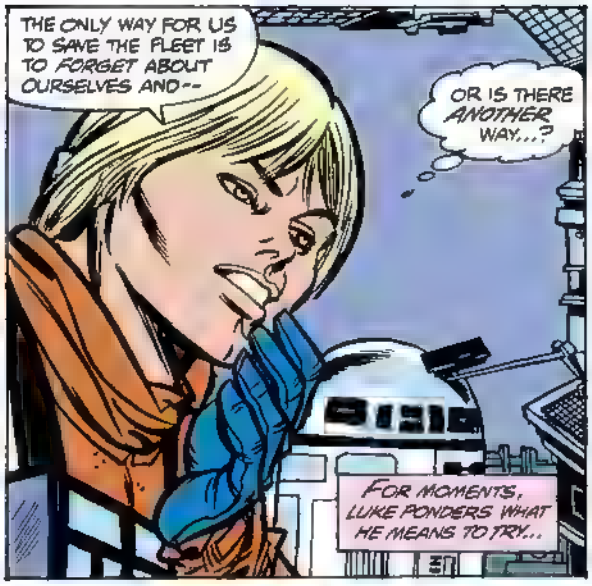

MUST SEEM LIKE I'VE BLOWN THE CHANCE YOU GAVE ME--
KLONG
KWONG
--BUT WE'RE CLOSE ENOUGH SO THE WALL INTERFERES WITH ITS PINCER MOVEMENT--
--LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO DO THIS!
DEAD FRONT WAS THE ONLY ANGLE TO KNOCK OUT ITS MOTOR CONTROLS--
FOOK!
--WITH ONE SHOT! NO MORE MENACE, ARTOO... IT'S JUST BURNING JUNK NOW!
BUT...
A-A CARGO DRUM..?!
VWOM!
THEN LUKE HEARS THE RATTLE OF THE AUTOMATED CONVEYER OVERHEAD AND REALIZES...
THOSE THINGS CONTAIN LIQUID PROPELLENT! HEAD FOR THE DOOR, LITTLE GUY!
THIS HOLD'S GONNA BECOME AN INFERNO!
WHREEEET!
AND THE DROID'S SHRILL WHISTLE SIGNALS THAT THE ONLY EXIT IS SWIFTLY, SURELY CLOSING!

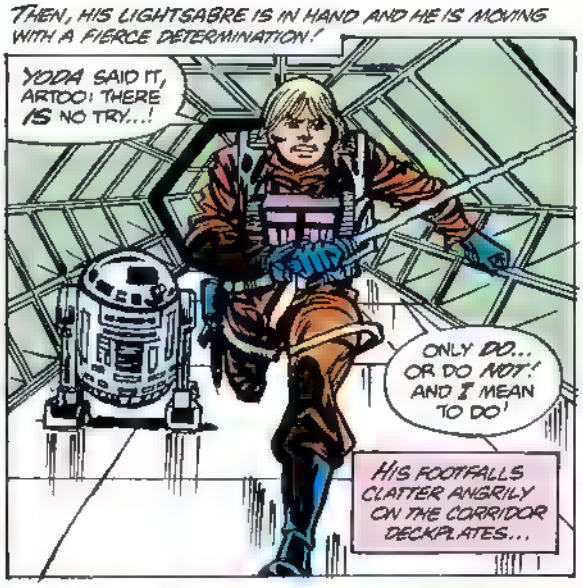

TOO LATE! ARTOO, YOU'VE GOT TO OVERRIDE THE BLOCKING MECHANISM!
TRRRR KLIK WHA-VOOT BREEEP!
YOU MEAN SOMETHING'S ALREADY OVERRIDING THE WHOLE COMPUTER SYSTEM?!
VABLEEP
DO WHAT YOU CAN AGAINST THOSE FLAMES, ARTOO! I'LL TACKLE THIS THE HARD WAY--
VRAMMP
--BY SHORT CIRCUITING THE DOOR LIFTS!
IT'S WORKING... BUT ONLY WHILE I KEEP THE LIGHTSABRE IN THERE.
GET UNDER FAST, ARTOO--
--I'M TUMBLING RIGHT BEHIND YOU!
THE MASSIVE DOOR THUNDERS DOWN, BARELY MISSING THE LITHE, ROLLING FIGURE...

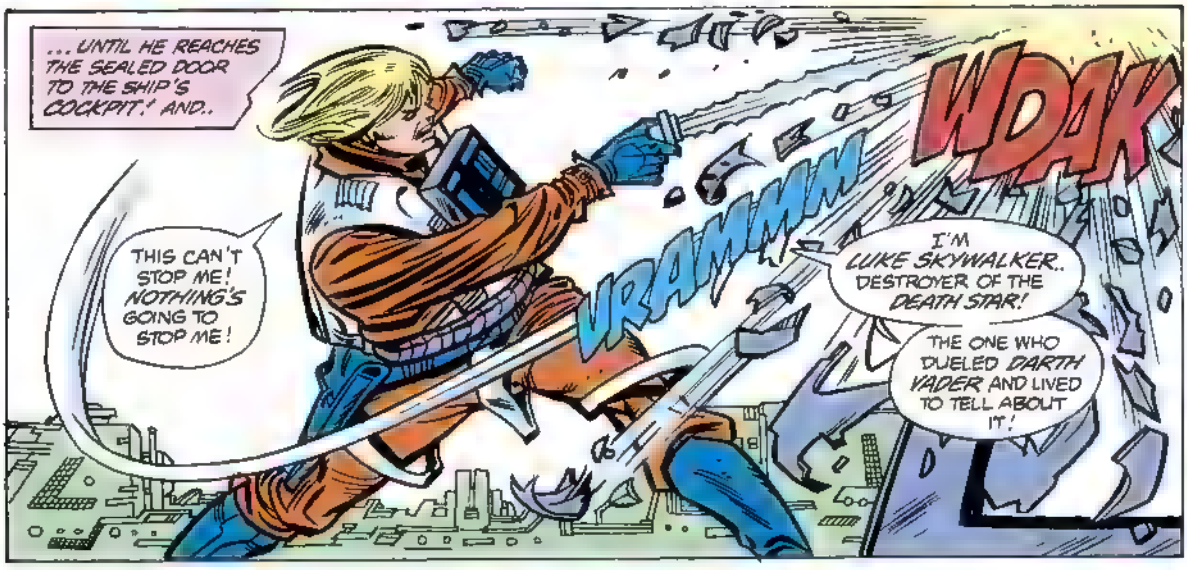
... AND FOR THE MOMENT THE YOUNG STAR WARRIOR AND HIS DROID KNOW SAFETY. FOR THE MOMENT...
STATUS REPORT ON SPECIAL PROBE 13-K...?
RESPONDING PERFECTLY TO ALL SECONDARY PROGRAMMING, ADMIRAL KRELL.
THEN THERE IS NO REASON NOT TO INIATE THE FINAL CYCLE.
THERE'S STILL SOME TIME, SIR.
IT MIGHT BE AMUSING TO SEE HOW 13-K RESOLVES THIS BUSINESS WITH THE REBEL INTERLOPER BEFORE--
WE'RE NOT DOING THIS FOR AMUSEMENT... BUT TO DESTROY THE REBEL FLEET.
THAT LONE SURVIVOR IS AN UNKNOWN FACTOR. WE'LL TAKE NO CHANCES ON HIM
GO TO THE FINAL CYCLE... NOW!
ABOARD THE BLOCKADE RUNNER, THERE IS SILENCE, GRIM AND FORBODING. LUKE STANDS STILL, NOT LISTENING, BUT... FEELING.
UNTIL...
SOMETHING HAPPENED.. JUST NOW... 8-BUT...
IMPATIENCE OVERTAKES HIM...
WHATEVER'S HAPPENING... IT'S GOT TO BE CONNECTED--

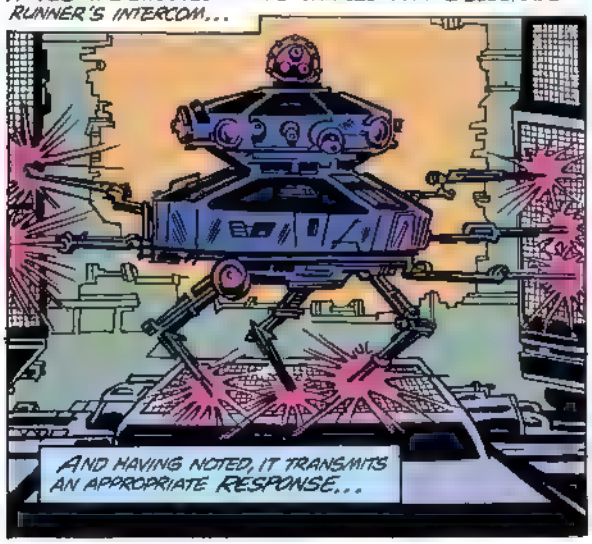

--WITH THE MAIN COMPUTER CHAMBER!
EVERY ATTACK ON US HAS INVOLVED THE SHIP'S AUTOMATED EQUIPMENT.
WHOEVER'S TAKEN OVER COULD ONLY DIRECT ALL THAT STUFF FROM--
--T-THERE!
FOR THE FIRST TIME, LUKE AND ARTOO BEHOLD THE TRUE NATURE OF THEIR ENEMY.. AND REALIZE HOW TERRIBLY COMPLETE THE TAKEOVER OF THE REBEL VESSEL IS!
THAT THING'S TAPPED INTO EVERY SYSTEM... MADE THE ENTIRE SHIP PRACTICALLY AN EXTENSION OF ITSELF!
SOMEONE'S REALLY AUGMENTED ITS PROGRAMMING! PROBE DROID'S WERE NEVER MENT TO OPERATE THIS INDEPENDENTLY!
DARTH VADER ONLY USED THEM TO TRACK ME AND THE OTHER REBELS!


BUT WHATEVER ITS CAPABILITIES... NO ONE'S GONNA USE THIS ONE ANYM--
;UNGHH!: ARTOO, YOU SPOILED MY SHOT! AND THAT PROBE'S WON'T GIVE US ANOTHER! W-WHAT--?
BRAKOW--
WEE-DOOOT FRAAAT!
SHOVED BY THE LITTLE DROID, LUKE RETREATS FROM THE PROBOT'S LASER BLASTS UNTIL...
WE'VE REACHED A CORRIDOR PRINT OUT TERMINAL... YOU CAN USE IT TO EXPLAIN.
ONLY WATCH YOURSELF! THAT MASS OF IMPERIAL TECHNOLOGY CAN ALSO USE IT... TO FRY YOUR CIRCUITS!
BUT WHAT INSTANTLY FLASHES ONTO THE TERMINAL'S VIEWSCREEN FOR LUKE TO READ...
...MAKES CLEAR WHY FURTHER DIRECT ACTION AGAINST THEM SHOULDN'T BE NECESSARY!
THE PROBOT'S LINKED ITSELF TO THE MAIN REACTOR AS WELL AS THE COMPUTER ,, AND IT'S BUILDING IT TOWARD CRITICAL MASS?!
ANY ATTEMPT TO DISLODGE OR DAMAGE THE DROID... WILL MAKE THE REACTOR BLOW! AND--
OH, NO!
BRR-VOOT...?
YOUR SCANNERS SAVED US, ARTOO, B-BUT--
WE'RE COMING UP ON THE FLEET! ONCE WE'RE AMONG THEM... THAT THING MUST INTEND TO EXPLODE THE SHIP!
AND IF WE DON'T DO SOMETHING, ARTOO... IT WILL!

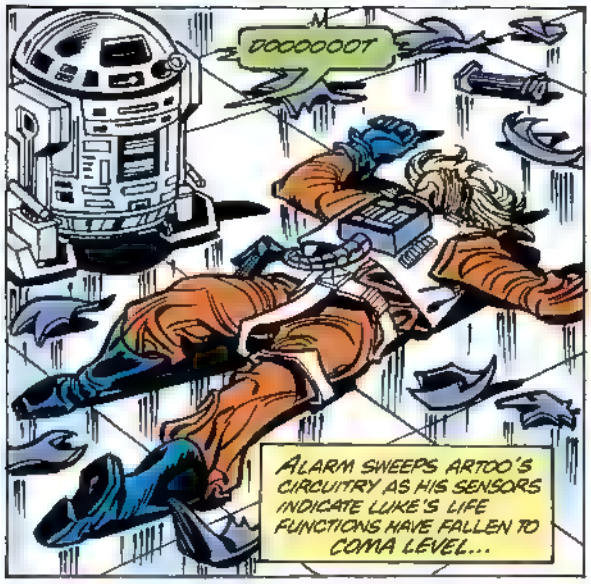

THE ONLY WAY FOR US TO SAVE THE FLEET IS TO FORGET ABOUT OURSELVES AND--
OR IS THERE ANOTHER WAY...?
FOR MOMENTS, LUKE PONDERS WHAT HE MEANS TO TRY..

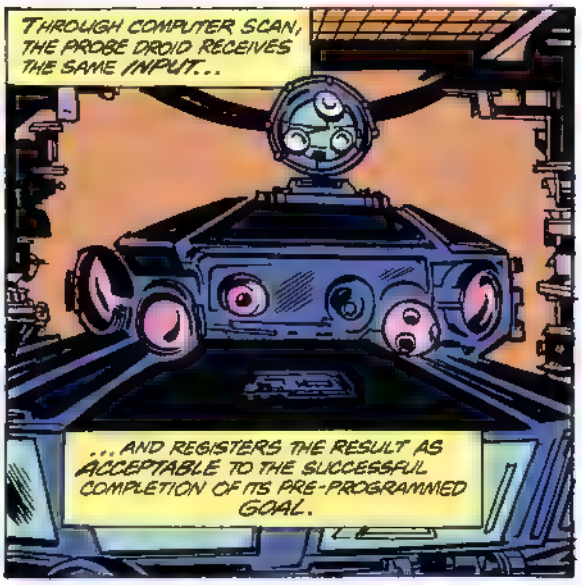

THEN, HIS LIGHTSABRE IS IN HAND AND HE IS MOVING WITH A FIERCE DETERMINATION!
YODA SAID IT, ARTOO! THERE IS NO TRY...!
ONLY DO... OR DO NOT! AND I MEAN TO DO!
HIS FOOTFALLS CLATTER ANGRILY ON THE CORRIDOR DECKPLATES...


...UNTIL HE REACHES THE SEALED DOOR TO THE SHIP'S COCKPIT.! AND..
VRAMMMM
WOAK
THIS CAN'T STOP ME! NOTHING'S GOING TO STOP ME!
I'M LUKE SKYWALKER.. DESTROYER OF THE DEATH STAR!
THE ONE WHO DUELED DARTH VADER AND LIVED TO TELL ABOUT IT!


WITHIN THE COMPUTER CHAMBER, PROBE ROBOT 13-K NOTES THE SHOUTED WORDS CARRIED VIA THE BLOCKADE RUNNER'S INTERCOM...
AND HAVING NOTED, IT TRANSMITS AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE...

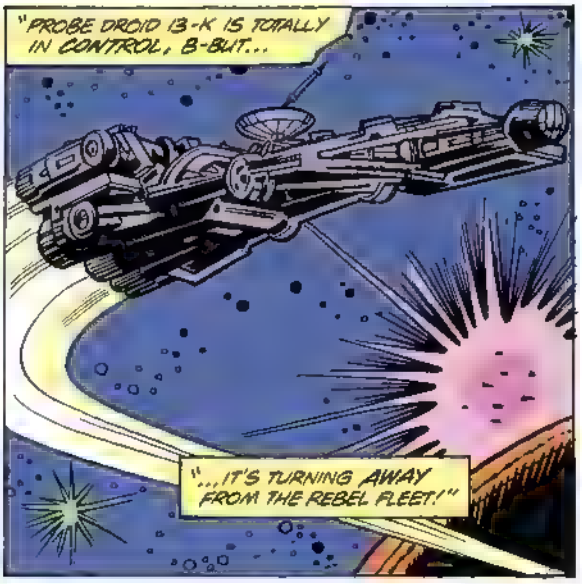
FRA-KOW
...IN THE FORM OF A POWER OVERLOAD TO A WALL CIRCUIT CLOSE BY THE TROUBLEMAKER!


DOOOOOOT
ALARM SWEEPS ARTOO'S CIRCUITRY AS HIS SENSORS INDICATE LUKE'S LIFE FUNCTIONS HAVE FALLEN TO COMA LEVEL...

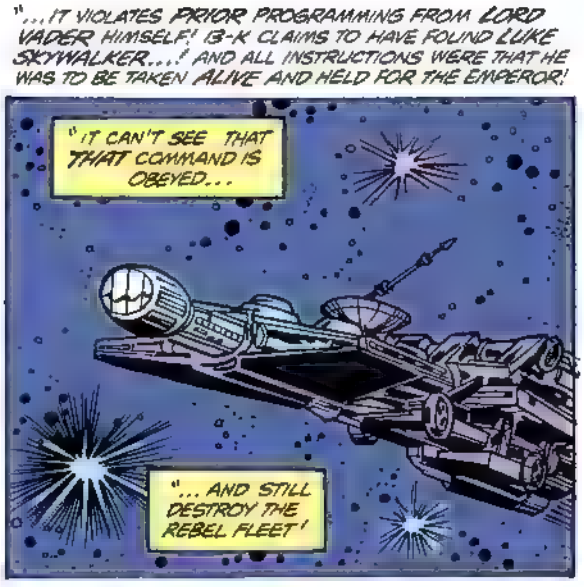

THROUGH COMPUTER SCAN, THE PROBE DROID RECEIVES THE SAME INPUT...
...AND REGISTERS THE RESULT AS ACCEPTABLE TO THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF ITS PRE-PROGRAMMED GOAL.

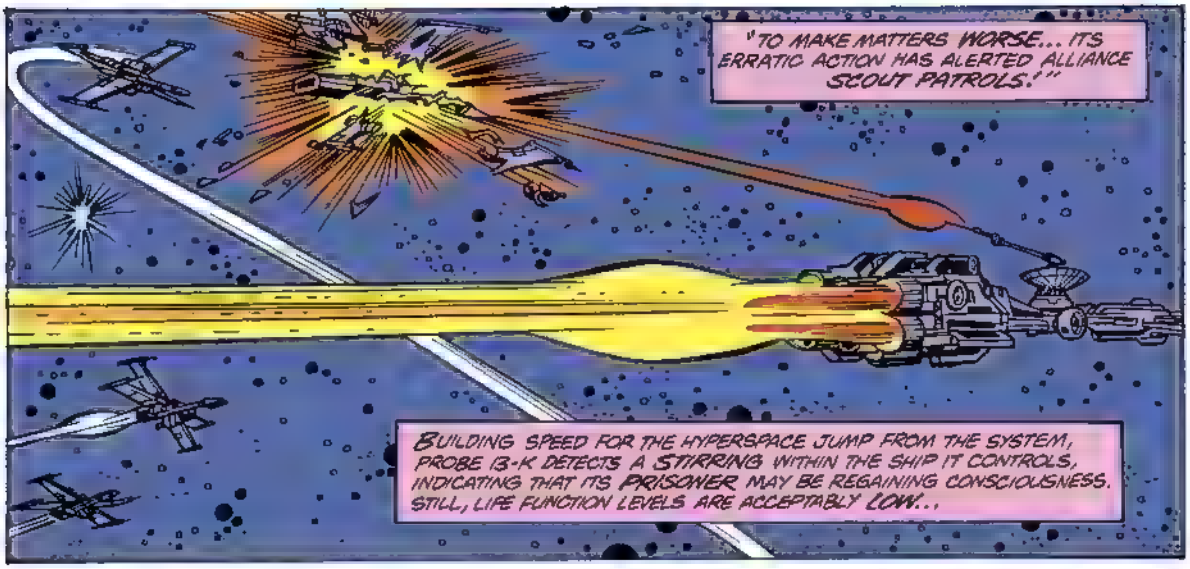
WHILE A HYPERSPACE JUMP AWAY, THE MAN WHO HAS BENT THIS PROBE TO HIS OWN PURPOSES PACES IMPATIENTLY...
REPORT, TRACKING OFFICER! 13-K SHOULD HAVE REACHED THE ALLIANCE FLEET! IF THAT LONE REBEL HAS TAMPERED--
NO PROBLEM, ADMIRAL KRELL! I'M GETTING SOMETHING NOW. THE FLEET'S IN SIGHT, THE INTERLOPER HAS BEEN NEUTRALIZED, AND--

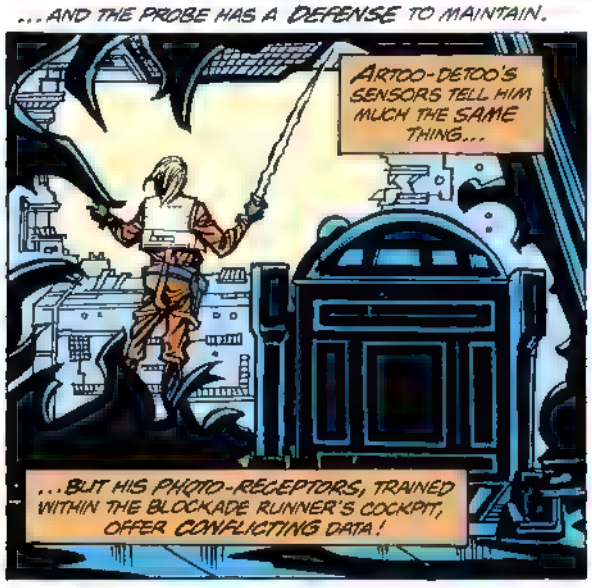
AND I'M MOMENTS FROM WINNING A PERSONAL COMMENDATION FROM THE EMPEROR!
WAIT, SIR! S-SOMETHING...I-I... DON'T UNDERSTAND..


"PROBE DROID 13-K IS TOTALLY IN CONTROL, B-BUT...
"...IT'S TURNING AWAY FROM THE REBEL FLEET!"

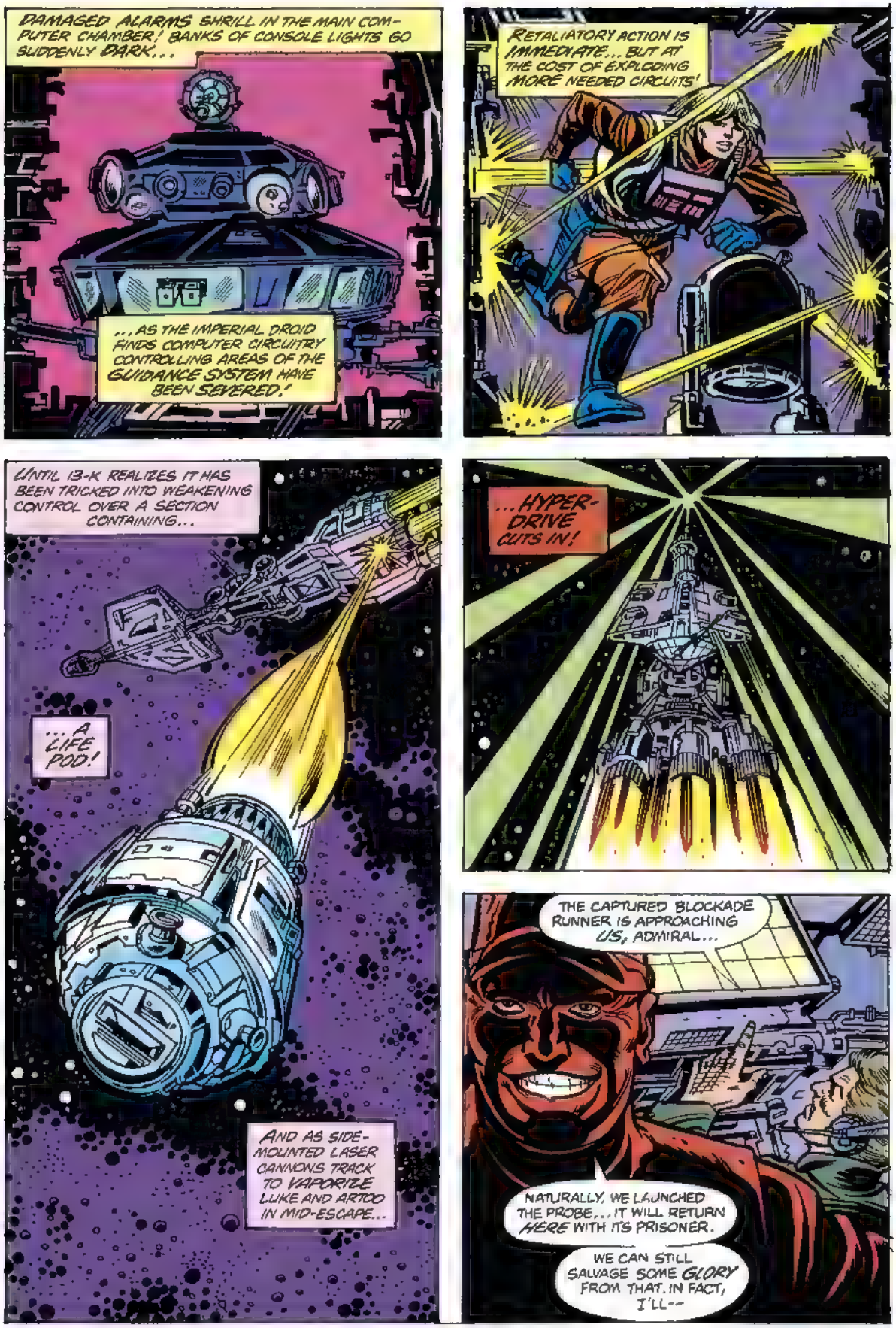
WHAT...?! CORRECT IT...! GET IT BACK ON COURSE!
I-I'M TRYING, SIR...ONLY... IT'S REFUSING OUR COMMAND! B-BECAUSE...

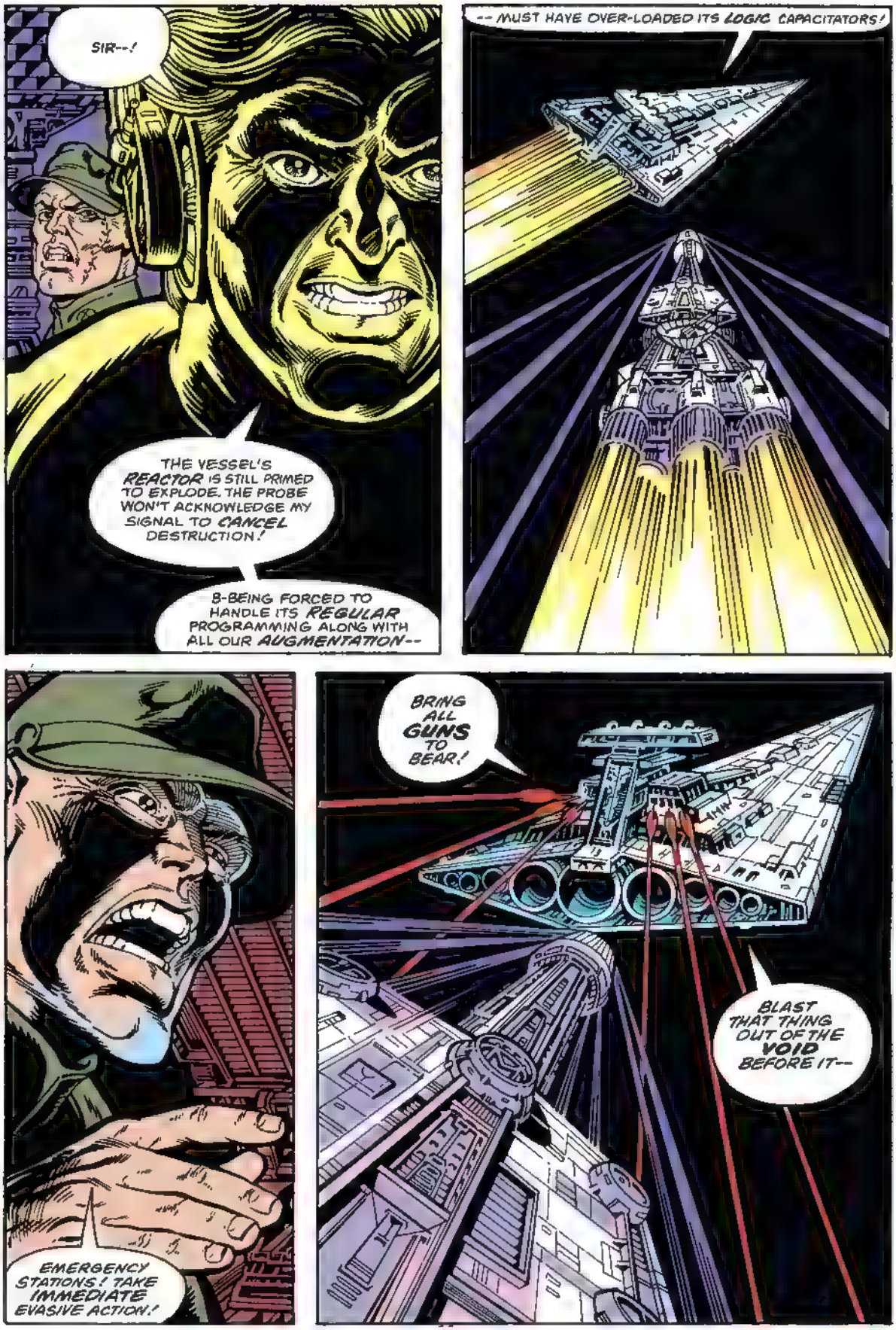

"...IT VIOLATES PRIOR PROGRAMMING FROM LORD VADER HIMSELF! I3-K CLAIMS TO HAVE FOUND LUKE SKYWALKER...! AND ALL INSTRUCTIONS WERE THAT HE WAS TO BE TAKEN ALIVE AND HELD FOR THE EMPEROR!
"IT CAN'T SEE THAT THAT COMMAND IS OBEYED...
"...AND STILL DESTROY THE REBEL FLEET!

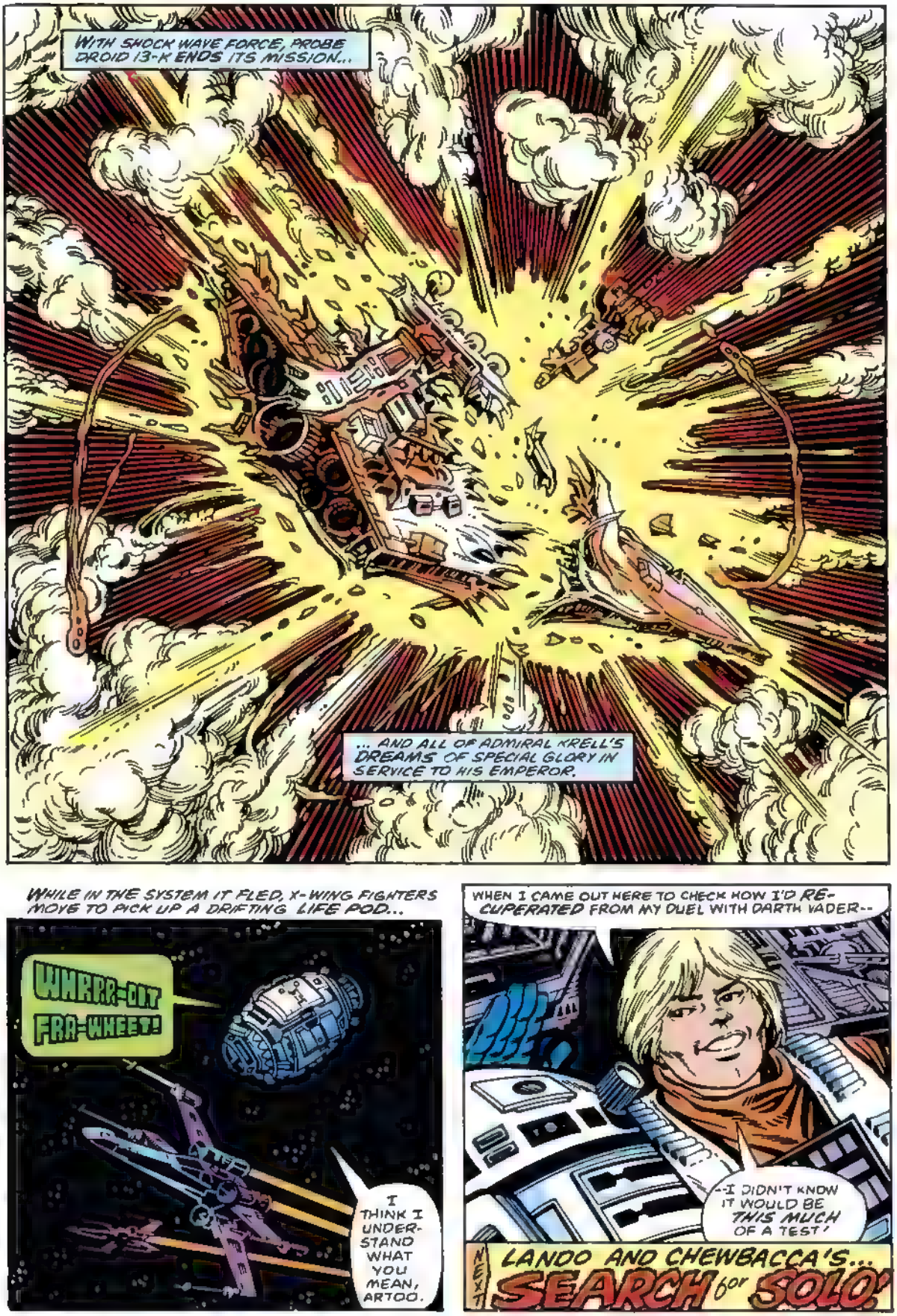

"TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE... ITS ERRATIC ACTION HAS ALERTED ALLIANCE SCOUT PATROLS!"
BUILDING SPEED FOR THE HYPERSPACE JUMP FROM THE SYSTEM, PROBE I3-K DETECTS A STIRRING WITHIN THE SHIP IT CONTROLS, INDICATING THAT ITS PRISONER MAY BE REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS. STILL, LIFE FUNCTION LEVELS ARE ACCEPTABLY LOW...

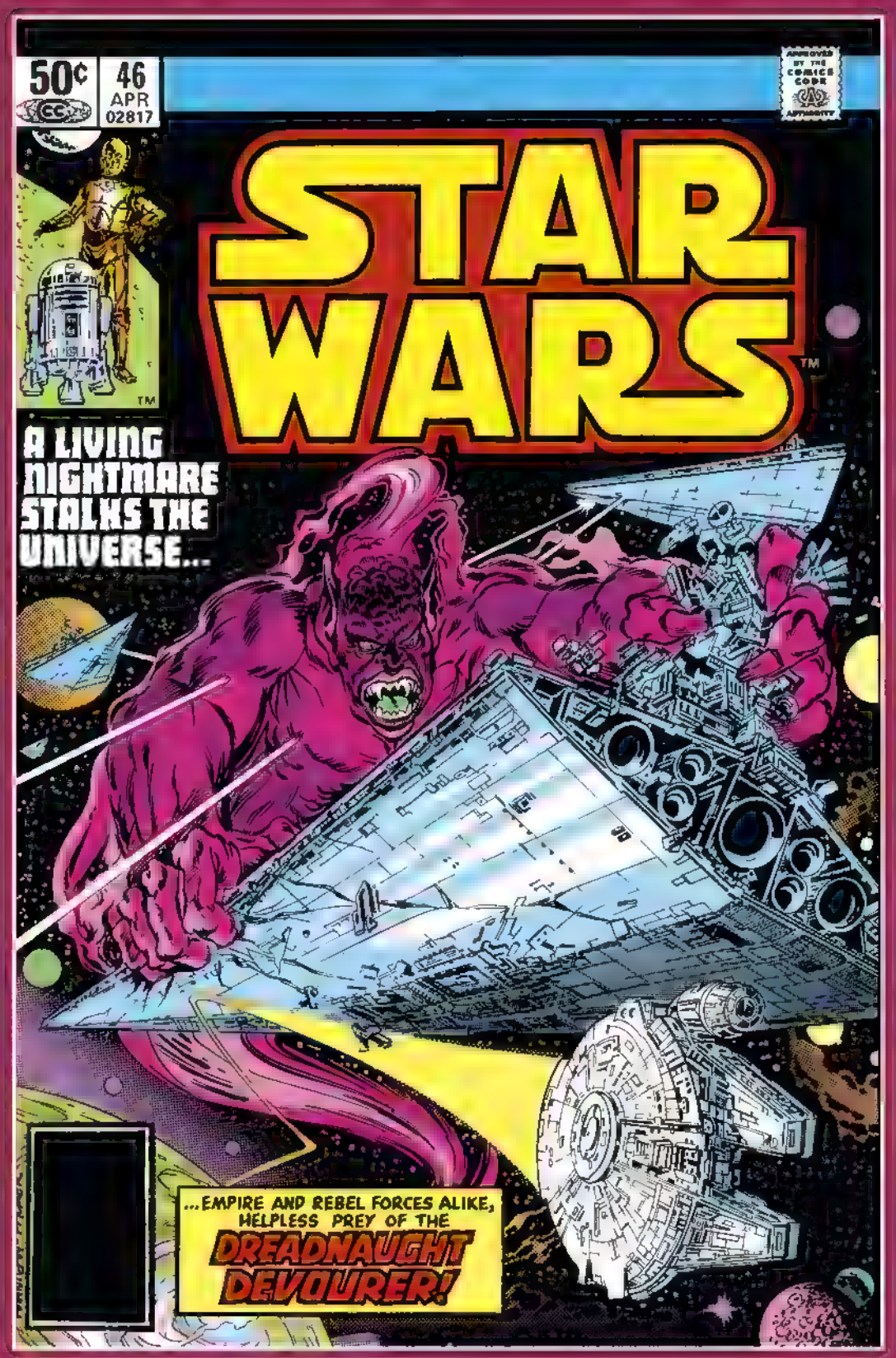

...AND THE PROBE HAS A DEFENSE TO MAINTAIN.
ARTOO-DETOO'S SENSORS TELL HIM MUCH THE SAME THING...
...BUT HIS PHOTO-RECEPTORS, TRAINED WITHIN THE BLOCKADE RUNNER'S COCKPIT, OFFER CONFLICTING DATA!

JUST...A... LITTLE.. LONGER..!
ARTOO! GET READY TO MOVE... FAST!
GOT TO MAINTAIN...! CONTROL MY... LIFE FUNCTIONS... THROUGH FORCE...KEEP SECRET... THAT I'M UP...MOVING... ACTING...! UNTIL...


DAMAGED ALARMS SHRILL IN THE MAIN COMPUTER CHAMBER! BANKS OF CONSOLE LIGHTS GO SUDDENLY DARK...
...AS THE IMPERIAL DROID FINDS COMPUTER CIRCUITRY CONTROLLING AREAS OF THE GUIDANCE SYSTEM HAVE BEEN SEVERED!
RETALIATORY ACTION IS IMMEDIATE... BUT AT THE COST OF EXPLODING MORE NEEDED CIRCUITS!
UNTIL 13-K REALIZES IT HAS BEEN TRICKED INTO WEAKENING CONTROL OVER A SECTION CONTAINING...
...A LIFE POD!
AND AS SIDE-MOUNTED LASER CANNONS TRACK TO VAPORIZE LUKE AND ARTOO IN MID-ESCAPE...
...HYPER-DRIVE CUTS IN!
THE CAPTURED BLOCKADE RUNNER IS APPROACHING US, ADMIRAL...
NATURALLY, WE LAUNCHED THE PROBE... IT WILL RETURN HERE WITH ITS PRISONER.
WE CAN STILL SALVAGE SOME GLORY FROM THAT. IN FACT, I'LL--


SIR--!
THE VESSEL'S REACTOR IS STILL PRIMED TO EXPLODE. THE PROBE WON'T ACKNOWLEDGE MY SIGNAL TO CANCEL DESTRUCTION!
B-BEING FORCED TO HANDLE ITS REGULAR PROGRAMMING ALONG WITH ALL OUR AUGMENTATION--
-- MUST HAVE OVER-LOADED ITS LOGIC CAPACITATORS!
EMERGENCY STATIONS! TAKE IMMEDIATE EVASIVE ACTION!
BRING ALL GUNS TO BEAR!
BLAST THAT THING OUT OF THE VOID BEFORE IT--


WITH SHOCK WAVE FORCE, PROBE DROID 13-K ENDS ITS MISSION...
... AND ALL OF ADMIRAL KRELL'S DREAMS OF SPECIAL GLORY IN SERVICE TO HIS EMPEROR.
WHILE IN THE SYSTEM IT FLED, X-WING FIGHTERS MOVE TO PICK UP A DRIFTING LIFE POD...
WHRRR-DIT FRA-WHEET!
I THINK I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN, ARTOO.
WHEN I CAME OUT HERE TO CHECK HOW I'D RECUPERATED FROM MY DUEL WITH DARTH VADER--
--I DIDN'T KNOW IT WOULD BE THIS MUCH OF A TEST!
NEXT LANDO AND CHEWBACCA'S... SEARCH for SOLO!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APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
STAR WARS™
A LIVING NIGHTMARE STALKS THE UNIVERSE...
...EMPIRE AND REBEL FORCES ALIKE, HELPLESS PREY OF THE
DREADNAUGHT DEVOURER!

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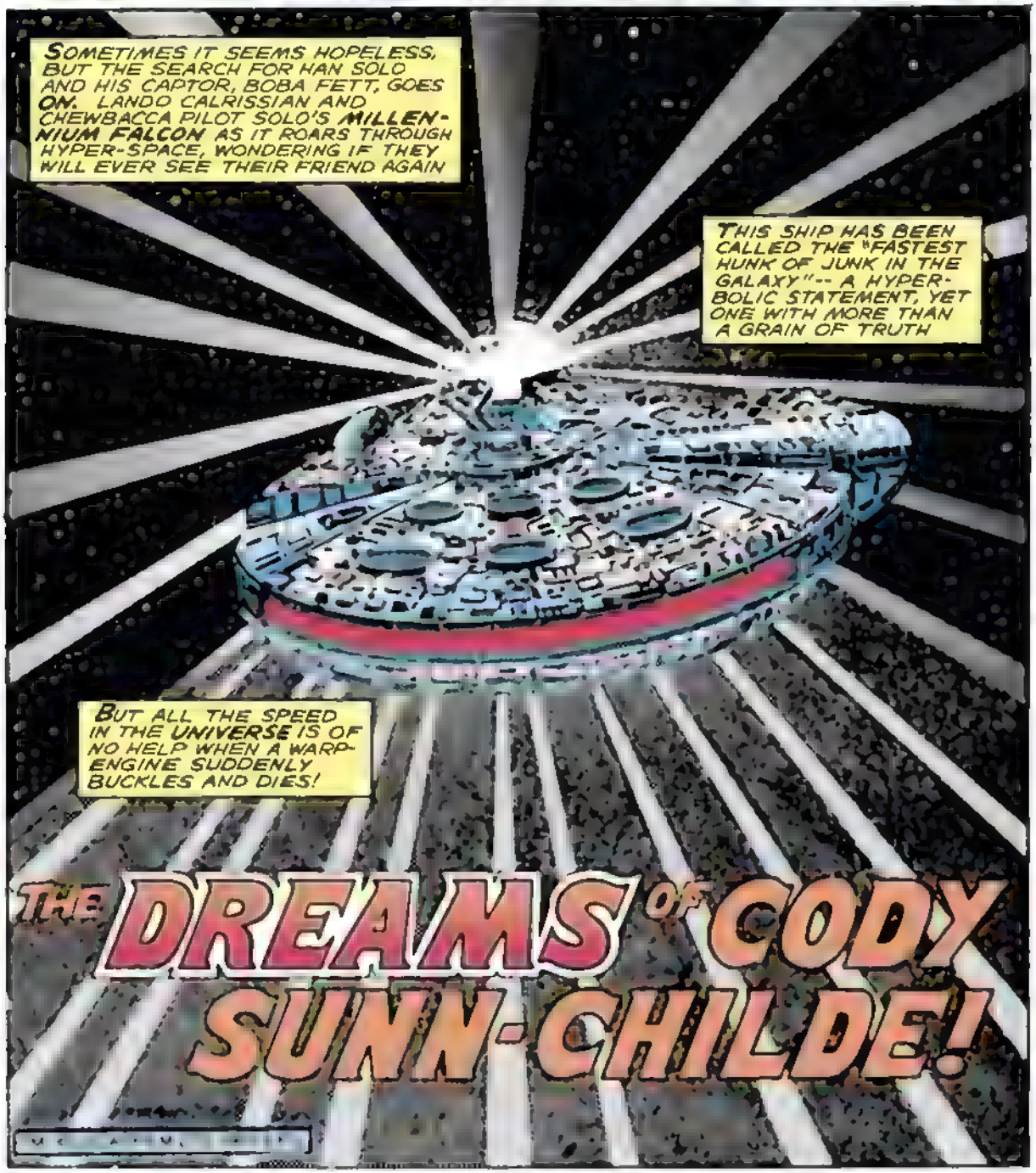
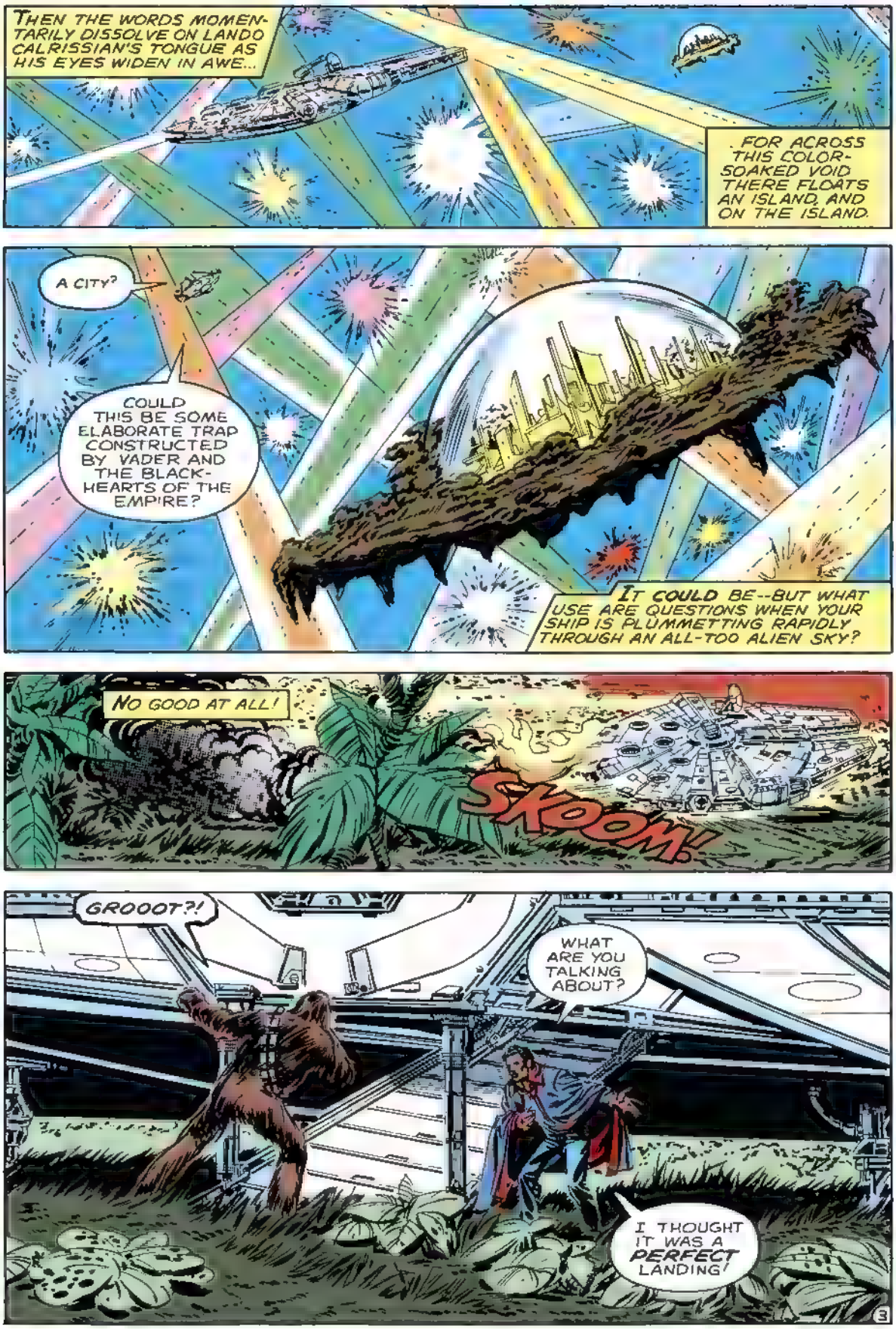
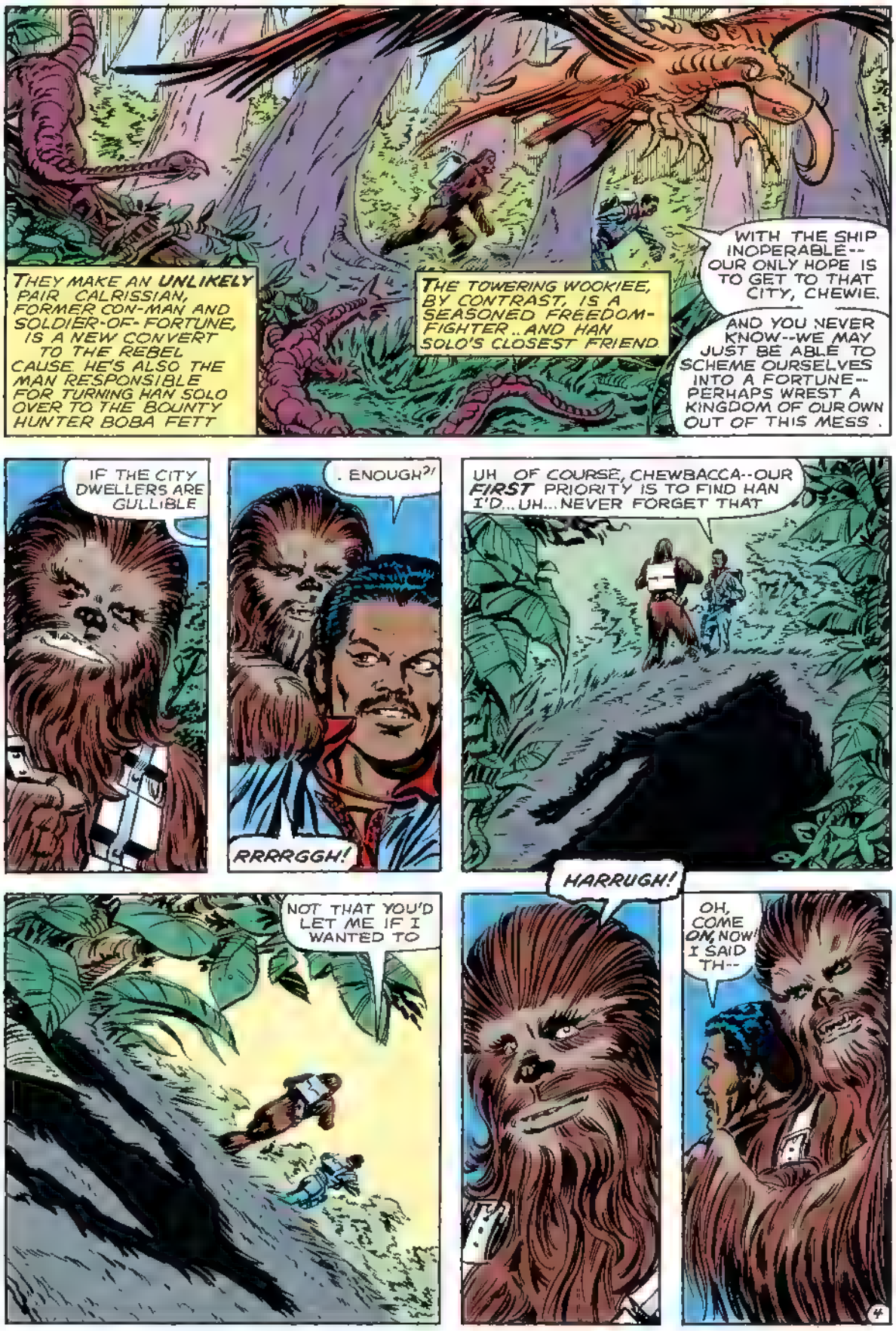
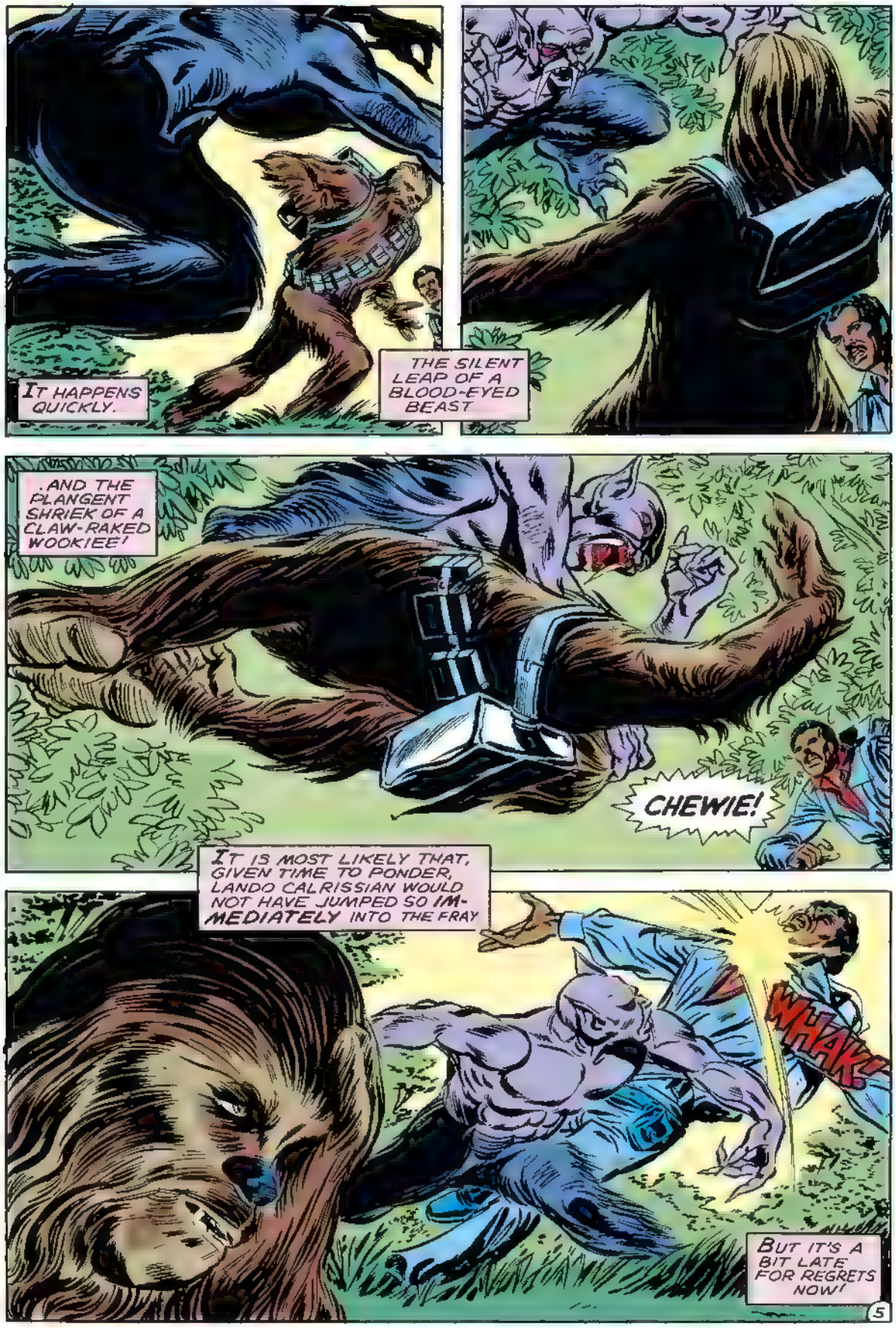

SOMETIMES IT SEEMS HOPELESS, BUT THE SEARCH FOR HAN SOLO AND HIS CAPTOR, BOBA FETT, GOES ON. LANDO CALRISSIAN AND CHEWBACCA PILOT SOLO'S MILLENNIUM FALCON AS IT ROARS THROUGH HYPER-SPACE, WONDERING IF THEY WILL EVER SEE THEIR FRIEND AGAIN
THIS SHIP HAS BEEN CALLED THE "FASTEST HUNK OF JUNK IN THE GALAXY"-- A HYPERBOLIC STATEMENT, YET ONE WITH MORE THAN A GRAIN OF TRUTH
BUT ALL THE SPEED IN THE UNIVERSE IS OF NO HELP WHEN A WARP-ENGINE SUDDENLY BUCKLES AND DIES!
THE DREAMS OF CODY SUNN-CHILDE!

WE'RE IN TROUBLE, CHEWIE-- BIG TROUBLE!
YARRGG?!
YOU'VE GOT ME, MY FURRY FRIEND-- I HAVEN'T THE FAINTEST IDEA WHERE WE ARE!
NYYORGG!
BEAUTIFUL IT IS-- LIKE HEAVEN OPENING WIDE IN WELCOME
...ALTHOUGH I DON'T KNOW OF ANY HEAVEN THAT WOULD READILY ADMIT A PAIR LIKE US!
2

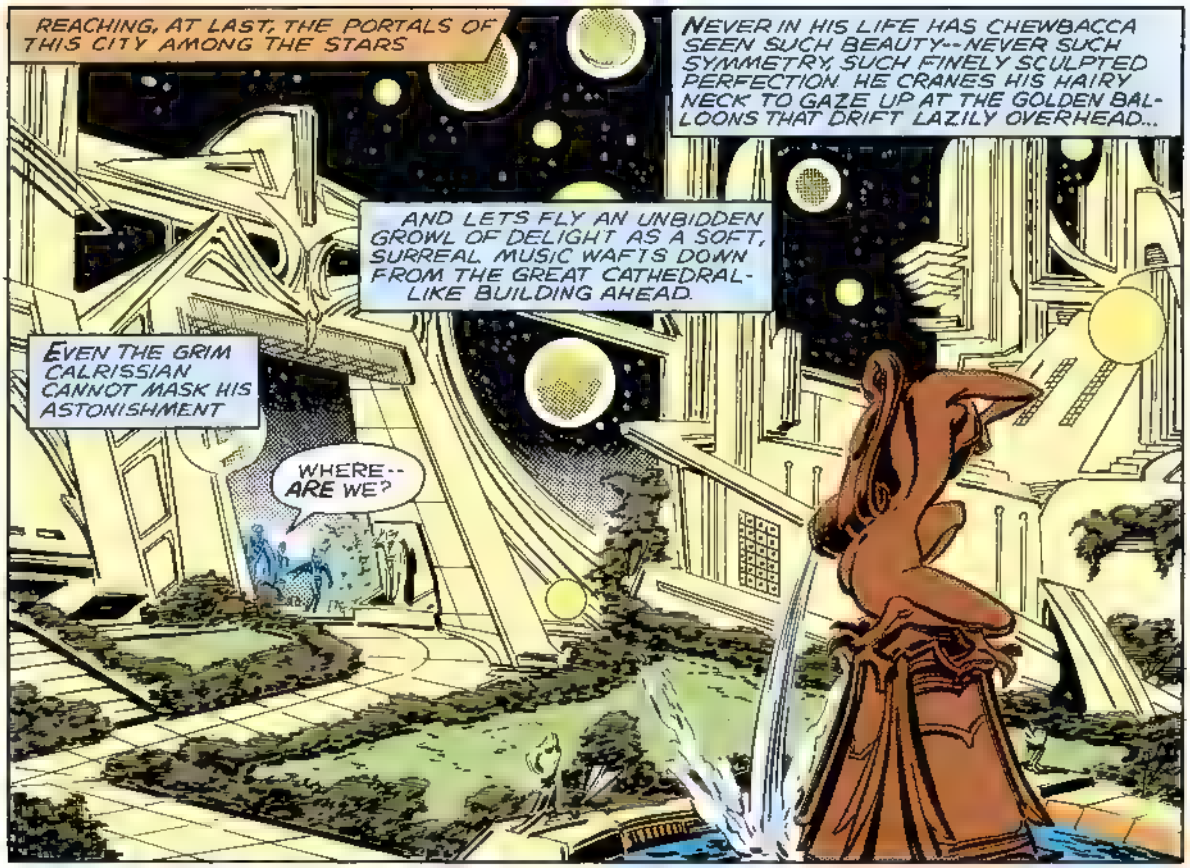

THEN THE WORDS MOMENTARILY DISSOLVE ON LANDO CALRISSIAN'S TONGUE AS HIS EYES WIDEN IN AWE...
...FOR ACROSS THIS COLOR-SOAKED VOID THERE FLOATS AN ISLAND, AND ON THE ISLAND
A CITY?
COULD THIS BE SOME ELABORATE TRAP CONSTRUCTED BY VADER AND THE BLACK-HEARTS OF THE EMPIRE?
IT COULD BE--BUT WHAT USE ARE QUESTIONS WHEN YOUR SHIP IS PLUMMETTING RAPIDLY THROUGH AN ALL-TOO ALIEN SKY?
NO GOOD AT ALL!
SKOOM!
GROOOT?!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
I THOUGHT IT WAS A PERFECT LANDING!


THEY MAKE AN UNLIKELY PAIR. CALRISSIAN, FORMER CON-MAN AND SOLDIER-OF-FORTUNE, IS A NEW CONVERT TO THE REBEL CAUSE. HE'S ALSO THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR TURNING HAN SOLO OVER TO THE BOUNTY HUNTER BOBA FETT
THE TOWERING WOOKIEE, BY CONTRAST, IS A SEASONED FREEDOM-FIGHTER..AND HAN SOLO'S CLOSEST FRIEND
WITH THE SHIP INOPERABLE--OUR ONLY HOPE IS TO GET TO THAT CITY, CHEWIE.
AND YOU NEVER KNOW--WE MAY JUST BE ABLE TO SCHEME OURSELVES INTO A FORTUNE--PERHAPS WREST A KINGDOM OF OUR OWN OUT OF THIS MESS.
IF THE CITY DWELLERS ARE GULLIBLE
. ENOUGH?!
RRRRGGH!
UH...OF COURSE, CHEWBACCA--OUR FIRST PRIORITY IS TO FIND HAN I'D...UH...NEVER FORGET THAT
NOT THAT YOU'D LET ME IF I WANTED TO
HARRUGH!
OH, COME ON, NOW! I SAID TH--
4

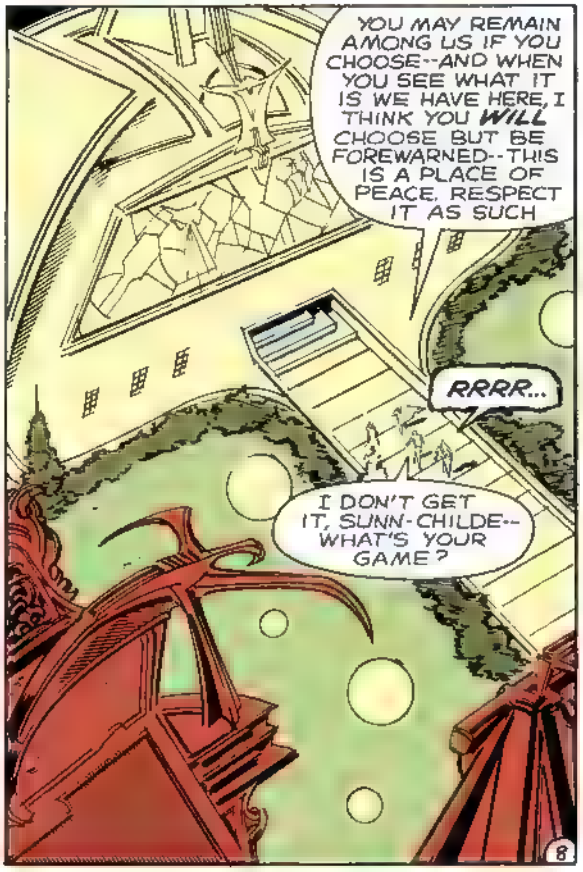

IT HAPPENS QUICKLY.
THE SILENT LEAP OF A BLOOD-EYED BEAST
...AND THE PLANGENT SHRIEK OF A CLAW-RAKED WOOKIEE!
CHEWIE!
IT IS MOST LIKELY THAT, GIVEN TIME TO PONDER, LANDO CALRISSIAN WOULD NOT HAVE JUMPED SO IM-MEDIATELY INTO THE FRAY
WHAK!
BUT IT'S A BIT LATE FOR REGRETS NOW!
5

UNGGH!
GNRRRGL!
THE CREATURE'S ATTACK IS SAVAGE, UNRELENTING, AND THE TWO STUNNED STAR WARRIORS ARE BEATEN NEAR-UNCONSCIOUS IN LESS TIME THAN IT WOULD TAKE TO SWAT A FLY
A DISTORTED GRIN SPREADS ACROSS THE AWFUL THING'S LEATHERN FACE IT RAISES ITS MUSCLED ARM
... AND HOWLS!
ENOUGH MY MONSTER-BROTHER'S VIOLENCE MUST HAVE EXPRESSION--BUT I WILL NOT ALLOW THE TAKING OF A SINGLE LIFE HERE IN MY REALM
WELL--WHY DO YOU STARE, STRANGERS? I AM NOT AN ENEMY.
IN FACT, I MAY PROVE TO BE THE GREATEST FRIEND YOU WILL EVER KNOW
6

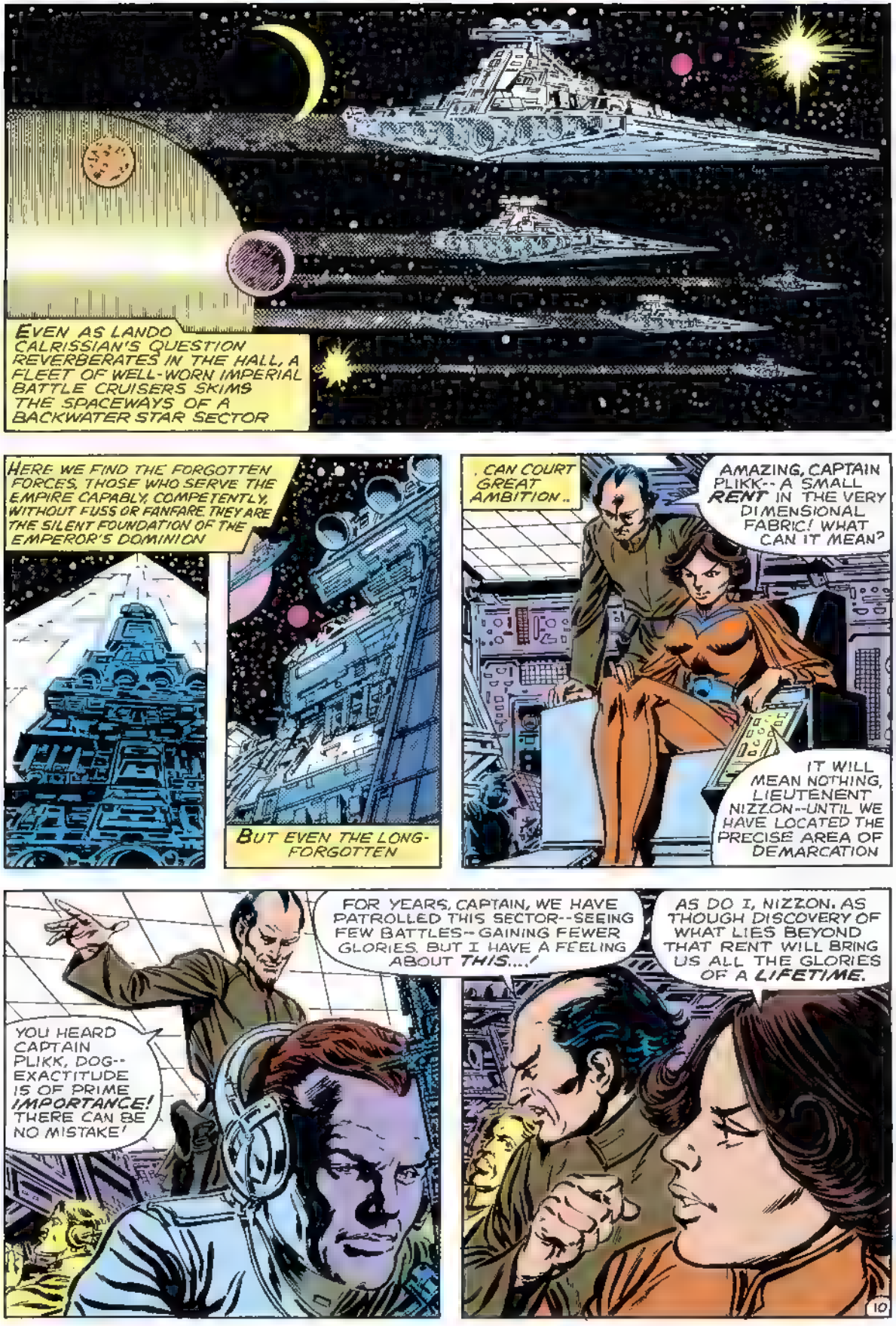
AH, NOW YOU RISE--BUT THERE IS STILL THAT GLINT OF WARINESS IN YOUR EYES. IS IT THAT YOU DOUBT MY GOOD FAITH?
THEN WATCH NOW AS I REACH OUT AND PULL MY MONSTER BROTHER UP FROM THE GROUND--DRAWING HIM INTO MYSELF.
"HE WILL TROUBLE YOU NO LONGER."
YOU..MISUNDERSTAND! I HESITATED BECAUSE THERE WAS SOMETHING--FAMILIAR ABOUT YOU!
AND NOW I REMEMBER! I SAW YOU IN ACTION AGAINST THE IMPERIALS WHEN I WAS JUST A BOY
YOU'RE CODY SUNN-CHILDE!
THE MUCH-LIONIZED HERO OF THE REBEL CAUSE?
THAT IS MY NAME, SIR--BUT NOMENCLATURE IS THE ONLY THING LINKING ME TO THE MAN OF VIOLENCE YOU RECALL.
KEEP THAT IN MIND.
ENOUGH TALK OF THE PAST! ENOUGH WASTING OF PRECIOUS MOMENTS! THESE JUNGLES ARE HAUNTED BY MANY MORE OF MY MONSTER-BROTHERS.
LET US LEAVE THEM--AND THE PAST--BEHIND US AS WE ENTER THE CITY.
THE STRANGE ASSEMBLAGE TRUDGES ON TOWARD THE GLITTERING SPIRES THAT RISE UP MAJESTICALLY BEFORE THEM.
7

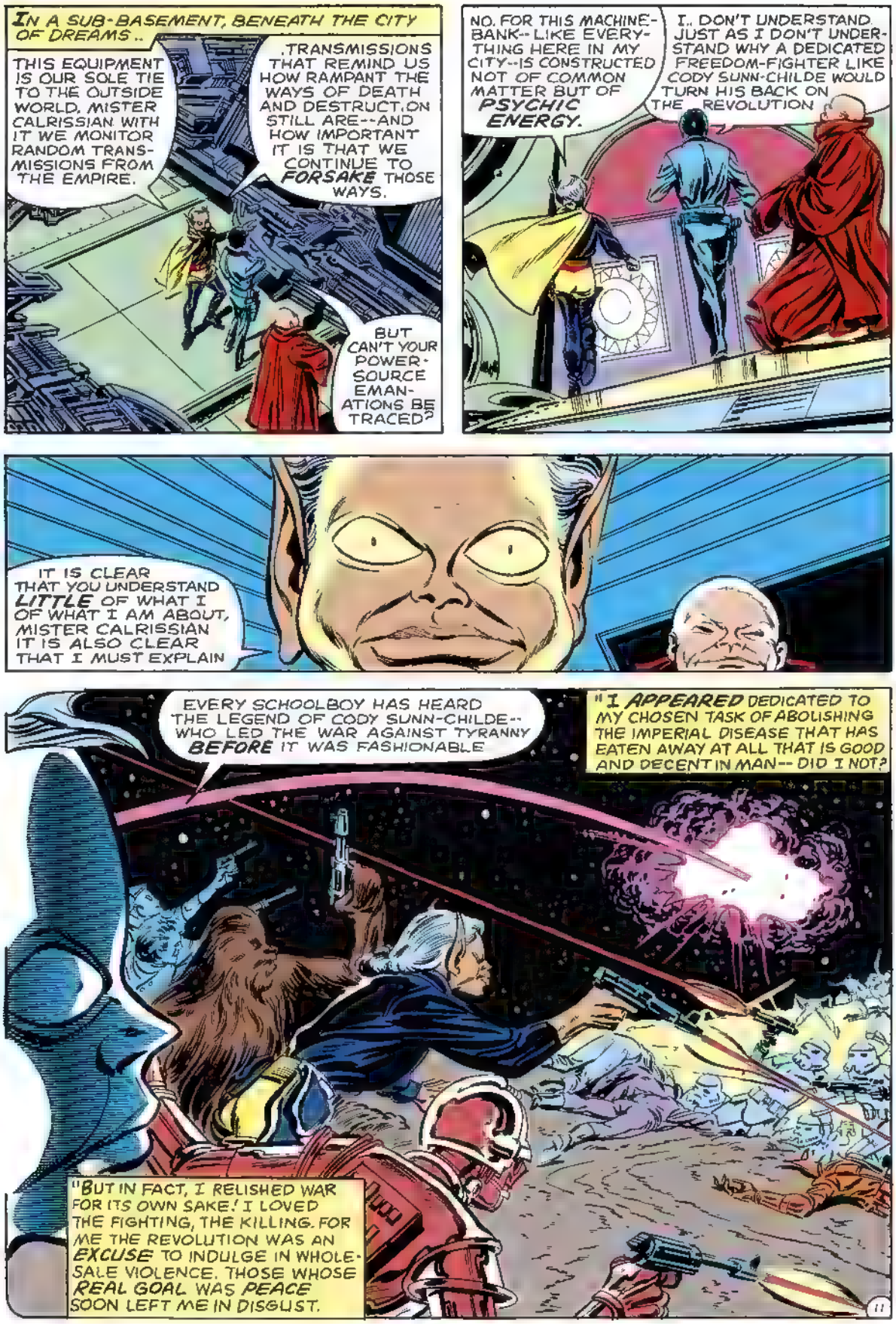

REACHING, AT LAST, THE PORTALS OF THIS CITY AMONG THE STARS
NEVER IN HIS LIFE HAS CHEWBACCA SEEN SUCH BEAUTY--NEVER SUCH SYMMETRY, SUCH FINELY SCULPTED PERFECTION. HE CRANES HIS HAIRY NECK TO GAZE UP AT THE GOLDEN BALLOONS THAT DRIFT LAZILY OVERHEAD...
AND LETS FLY AN UNBIDDEN GROWL OF DELIGHT AS A SOFT, SURREAL MUSIC WAFTS DOWN FROM THE GREAT CATHEDRAL-LIKE BUILDING AHEAD.
EVEN THE GRIM CALRISSIAN CANNOT MASK HIS ASTONISHMENT
WHERE-- ARE WE?

IN ANOTHER DIMENSION FROM THE ONE THAT BIRTHED US WHEN YOUR WARP ENGINE EXPLODED IT MUST HAVE SOMEHOW PIERCED THE WALL-BETWEEN AND BROUGHT YOU HERE

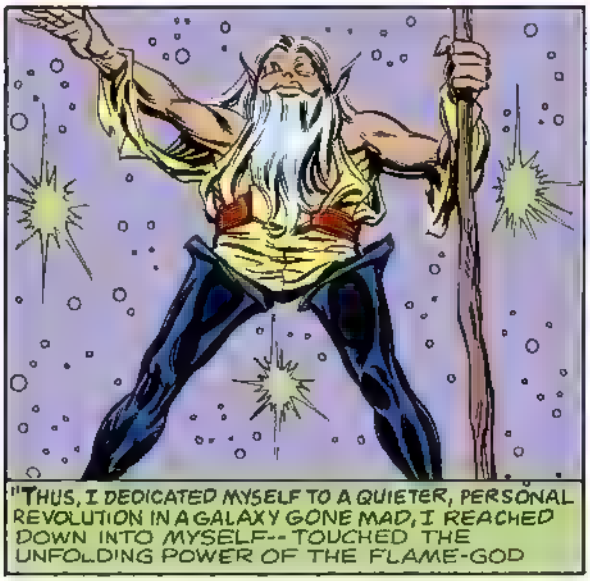

YOU MAY REMAIN AMONG US IF YOU CHOOSE--AND WHEN YOU SEE WHAT IT IS WE HAVE HERE, I THINK YOU WILL CHOOSE BUT BE FOREWARNED--THIS IS A PLACE OF PEACE. RESPECT IT AS SUCH
RRRR...
I DON'T GET IT, SUNN-CHILDE-- WHAT'S YOUR GAME?
8

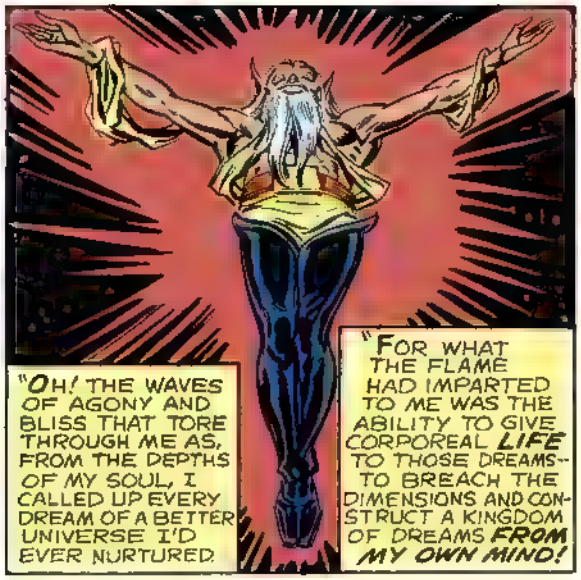
WE PLAY NO GAMES IN OUR CITY OF DREAMS, SIR--WE HIDE BEHIND NEITHER SOPHISTRY NOR CHICANERY!
OUR MASTER SUNN-CHILDE HAS BUILT A HAVEN FROM MADNESS. EMBRACE IT WARMLY.
AS I SEE YOUR WOOKIEE FRIEND IS LEARNING TO DO RIGHT NOW!
VROWR.
IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME--TOO LONG, SINCE CHEWBACCA HAS BEEN HOME.
THE SIGHT OF A FELLOW WOOKIEE MAKES HIS HEART SING.
CHE-ROOOR
TAKE THE WORD OF ANSIBLE BEELYARD--HERE YOU HAVE FOUND A UNIVERSE UNTAINTED BY THE DARKNESS OF THE EMPIRE!
BEELYARD? BEELYARD, THE HOLY TERROR? HE WAS YOUR RIGHT-HAND MAN, SUNN-CHILDE AND--LIKE YOU--HE VANISHED NEARLY A DECADE AGO!
WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?!
9

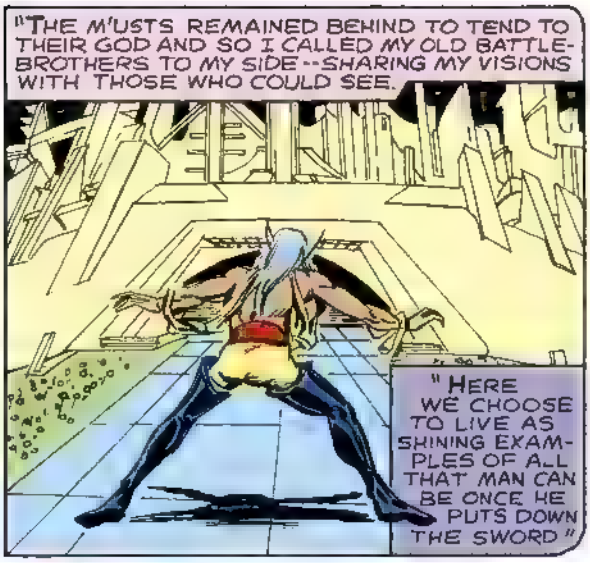

EVEN AS LANDO CALRISSIAN'S QUESTION REVERBERATES IN THE HALL, A FLEET OF WELL-WORN IMPERIAL BATTLE CRUISERS SKIMS THE SPACEWAYS OF A BACKWATER STAR SECTOR
HERE WE FIND THE FORGOTTEN FORCES, THOSE WHO SERVE THE EMPIRE CAPABLY, COMPETENTLY, WITHOUT FUSS OR FANFARE. THEY ARE THE SILENT FOUNDATION OF THE EMPEROR'S DOMINION
BUT EVEN THE LONG-FORGOTTEN
. CAN COURT GREAT AMBITION..
AMAZING, CAPTAIN PLIKK-- A SMALL RENT IN THE VERY DIMENSIONAL FABRIC! WHAT CAN IT MEAN?
IT WILL MEAN NOTHING, LIEUTENENT NIZZON--UNTIL WE HAVE LOCATED THE PRECISE AREA OF DEMARCATION
YOU HEARD CAPTAIN PLIKK, DOG-- EXACTITUDE IS OF PRIME IMPORTANCE! THERE CAN BE NO MISTAKE!
FOR YEARS, CAPTAIN, WE HAVE PATROLLED THIS SECTOR--SEEING FEW BATTLES--GAINING FEWER GLORIES. BUT I HAVE A FEELING ABOUT THIS....!
AS DO I, NIZZON. AS THOUGH DISCOVERY OF WHAT LIES BEYOND THAT RENT WILL BRING US ALL THE GLORIES OF A LIFETIME.
10

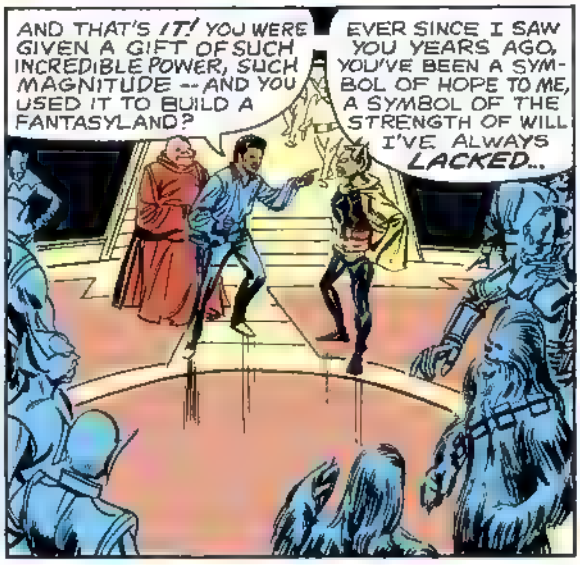

IN A SUB-BASEMENT, BENEATH THE CITY OF DREAMS ..
THIS EQUIPMENT IS OUR SOLE TIE TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD, MISTER CALRISSIAN WITH IT WE MONITOR RANDOM TRANSMISSIONS FROM THE EMPIRE.
..TRANSMISSIONS THAT REMIND US HOW RAMPANT THE WAYS OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION STILL ARE--AND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS THAT WE CONTINUE TO FORSAKE THOSE WAYS.
BUT CAN'T YOUR POWER-SOURCE EMANATIONS BE TRACED?
NO. FOR THIS MACHINE-BANK--LIKE EVERYTHING HERE IN MY CITY--IS CONSTRUCTED NOT OF COMMON MATTER BUT OF PSYCHIC ENERGY.
I.. DON'T UNDERSTAND JUST AS I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY A DEDICATED FREEDOM-FIGHTER LIKE CODY SUNN-CHILDE WOULD TURN HIS BACK ON THE REVOLUTION
IT IS CLEAR THAT YOU UNDERSTAND LITTLE OF WHAT I OF WHAT I AM ABOUT, MISTER CALRISSIAN IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT I MUST EXPLAIN
EVERY SCHOOLBOY HAS HEARD THE LEGEND OF CODY SUNN-CHILDE--WHO LED THE WAR AGAINST TYRANNY BEFORE IT WAS FASHIONABLE
"I APPEARED DEDICATED TO MY CHOSEN TASK OF ABOLISHING THE IMPERIAL DISEASE THAT HAS EATEN AWAY AT ALL THAT IS GOOD AND DECENT IN MAN-- DID I NOT?
"BUT IN FACT, I RELISHED WAR FOR ITS OWN SAKE! I LOVED THE FIGHTING, THE KILLING. FOR ME THE REVOLUTION WAS AN EXCUSE TO INDULGE IN WHOLESALE VIOLENCE. THOSE WHOSE REAL GOAL WAS PEACE SOON LEFT ME IN DISGUST.
11

"HOW LONG COULD A MAN FOLLOW A PATH AS IMBALANCED AS THAT BEFORE HE HIMSELF FELL AS THE RESULT OF HIS OWN UNBRIDLED VIOLENCE?
"MY IMBALANCE CAME DURING A TRUCULENT BATTLE ON A LITTLE-KNOWN WORLD FRESHLY CONQUERED BY THE EMPIRE A LASER-BLAST HURLED ME THROUGH A CRAVASSE INTO THE BOWELS OF THE PLANET
" AND I WAS SWALLOWED
" BY A MYSTERIOUS FLAME. THE M'USTS--THE SUBTERRANEAN PRIMITIVES DWELLING IN THAT CAVERN--COULD NOT BELIEVE THEIR EYES
" FOR THIS ETERNALLY-BURNING FIRE WAS THEIR GOD, AND NO ONE HAD EVER SURVIVED IMMERSION IN IT BEFORE!
"PERHAPS IT WAS THE LATENT MYSTIC ABILITIES OF MY OWN RACE MINGLING WITH THE FLAME-GOD ITSELF OR PERHAPS IT WAS SOMETHING.. GREATER
"IN ANY CASE, I BECAME FILLED WITH A STRANGE AND UNIMAGINABLE POWER. WHILE I LEARNED TO WIELD IT, I REMAINED AMONG THE M'USTS.
"THEY TOOK ME AS THEIR HEAVEN-SENT MASTER BUT, IN TRUTH, I LEARNED FROM THEM... LEARNED OF SIMPLICITY--AND PEACE
"WHEN FINALLY I RETURNED TO THE SURFACE--STRODE THROUGH THAT SEA OF PUTRIFYING CORPSES-- I REALIZED THAT MY POWER HAD INCREASED A THOUSAND FOLD.
.. AND THAT I COULD NOT FOR ANY REASON WHATEVER, ALLOW MYSELF TO LIFT MY HAND AGAINST MY FELLOW MAN WITHOUT UNLEASHING ALL THE SAVAGERY THAT WAS IN THE DARKEST PART OF MY SOUL.
12

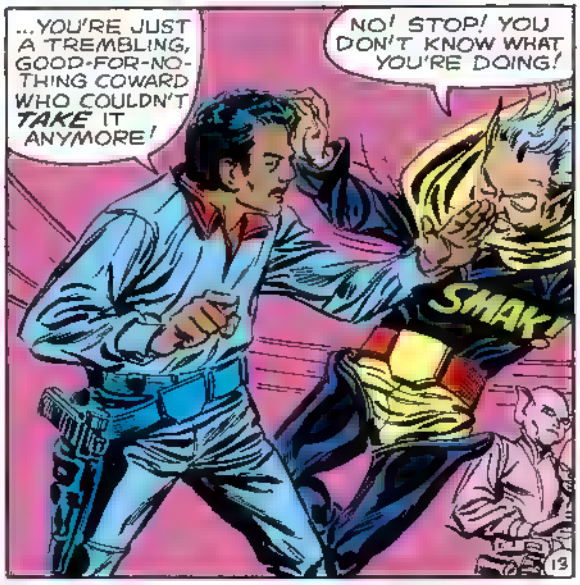

"THUS, I DEDICATED MYSELF TO A QUIETER, PERSONAL REVOLUTION IN A GALAXY GONE MAD, I REACHED DOWN INTO MYSELF-- TOUCHED THE UNFOLDING POWER OF THE FLAME-GOD


"OH! THE WAVES OF AGONY AND BLISS THAT TORE THROUGH ME AS, FROM THE DEPTHS OF MY SOUL, I CALLED UP EVERY DREAM OF A BETTER UNIVERSE I'D EVER NURTURED
"FOR WHAT THE FLAME HAD IMPARTED TO ME WAS THE ABILITY TO GIVE CORPOREAL LIFE TO THOSE DREAMS-- TO BREACH THE DIMENSIONS AND CONSTRUCT A KINGDOM OF DREAMS FROM MY OWN MIND!


"THE M'USTS REMAINED BEHIND TO TEND TO THEIR GOD AND SO I CALLED MY OLD BATTLE-BROTHERS TO MY SIDE--SHARING MY VISIONS WITH THOSE WHO COULD SEE.
"HERE WE CHOOSE TO LIVE AS SHINING EXAMPLES OF ALL THAT MAN CAN BE ONCE HE PUTS DOWN THE SWORD"

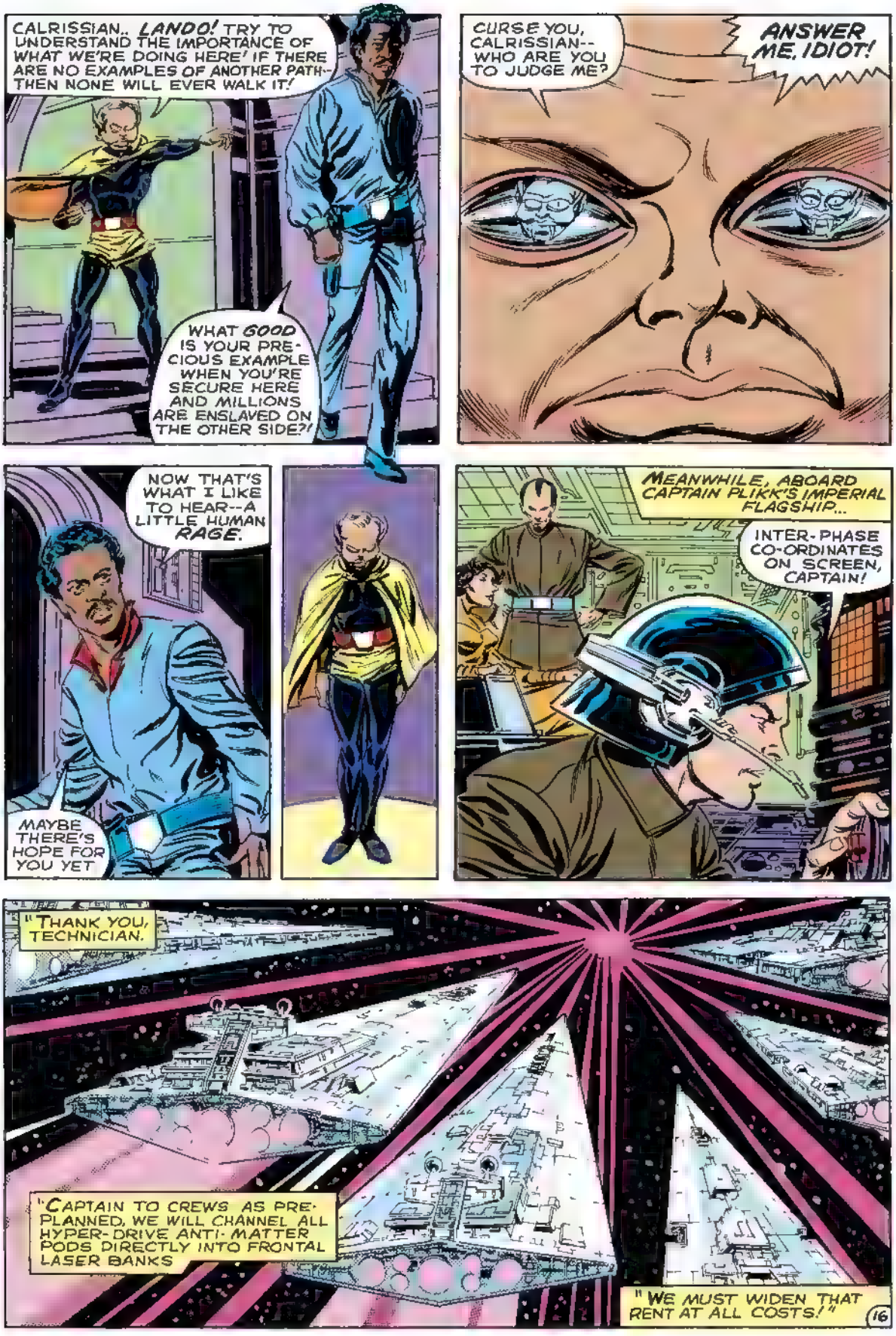

AND THAT'S IT! YOU WERE GIVEN A GIFT OF SUCH INCREDIBLE POWER, SUCH MAGNITUDE -- AND YOU USED IT TO BUILD A FANTASYLAND?
EVER SINCE I SAW YOU YEARS AGO, YOU'VE BEEN A SYMBOL OF HOPE TO ME, A SYMBOL OF THE STRENGTH OF WILL I'VE ALWAYS LACKED..

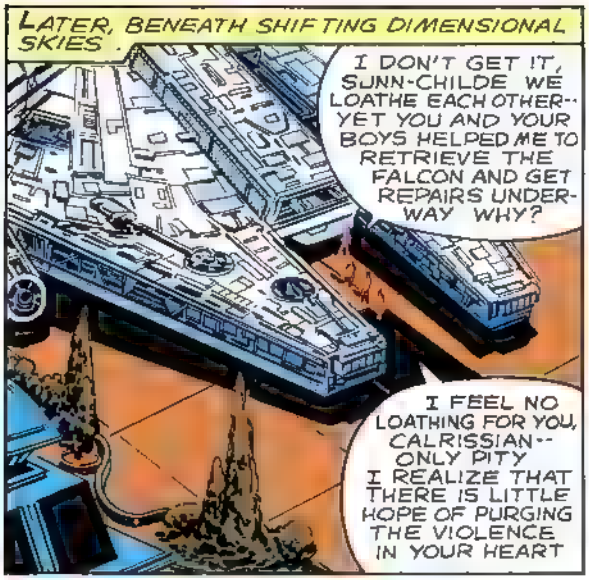
BUT YOU'RE NOT STRONG, SUNN-CHILDE

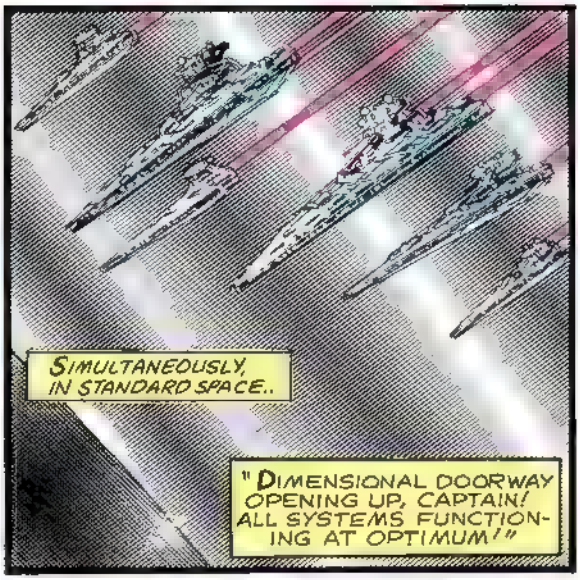

...YOU'RE JUST A TREMBLING, GOOD-FOR-NOTHING COWARD WHO COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!
NO! STOP! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING!
SMAK!
13

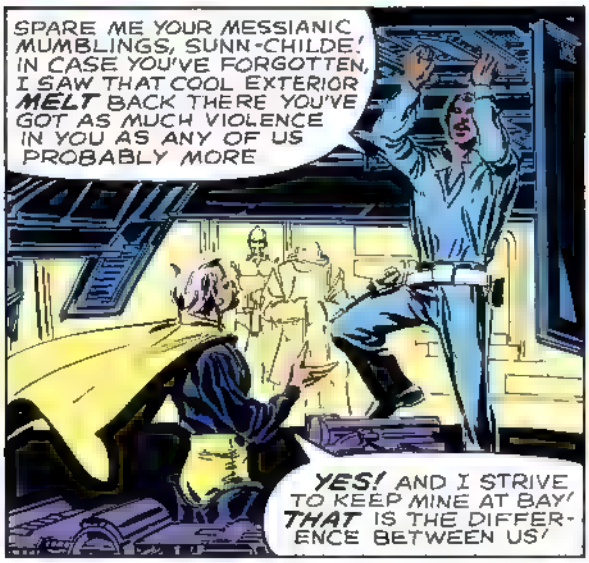
K-
RASH!
YOUR VIOLENCE HAS DRAWN THEM!
FOOL!
FWAKK!
DO YOU THINK SUCH POWER AS MINE COMES WITHOUT A PRICE? JUST AS MY PSYCHE BUILT THIS CITY, SO DID IT BIRTH THAT JUNGLE OUTSIDE AND THE FERAL HORRORS I CAST THERE.
BLUMPF!
...THE REPRESSED HORRORS OF MY OWN SOUL!
ALWAYS I STRUGGLE TO HOLD THEM BEYOND THE GATES WHERE THEY CAN VENT THEIR EVIL WITHOUT HARM! BUT THEY DEMAND FREE REIGN
AND EACH DAY I MUST DRAW MORE AND MORE OF THEIR NUMBER BACK INTO ME!
14

YOUR MYSTICAL THEATRICS ARE IMPRESSIVE, SUNN-CHILDE BUT-- I-- HEY! CHEWIE!
YOU'RE GETTING AWFULLY CHUMMY WITH THESE PUSILLANIMOUS DREAMERS!
CHEWIE-- I'M TALKING TO Y--
GROWWR!
I THINK WHAT HE'S TRYING TO SAY, SIR, IS THAT EVEN WOOKIEES CAN DREAM.
DROID SHUT UP!
THAT HAIRY THUG ALMOST FLATTENED ME A WHILE AGO FOR FORGETTING ABOUT A DEAR FR END OF HIS! NOW LOOK AT HIM!
IT'S LIKE A PLAGUE
15

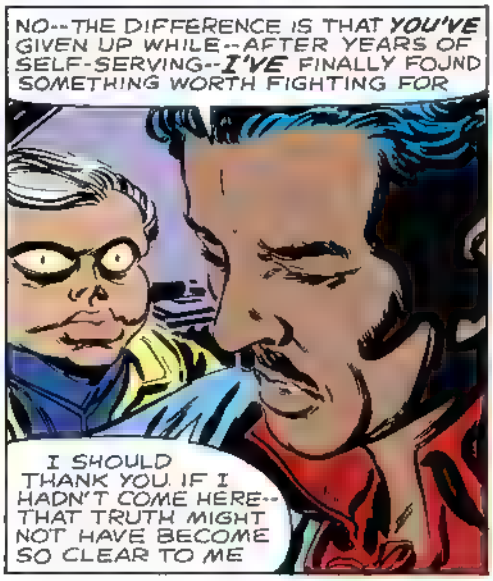

CALRISSIAN.. LANDO! TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT WE'RE DOING HERE! IF THERE ARE NO EXAMPLES OF ANOTHER PATH--THEN NONE WILL EVER WALK IT!
WHAT GOOD IS YOUR PRECIOUS EXAMPLE WHEN YOU'RE SECURE HERE AND MILLIONS ARE ENSLAVED ON THE OTHER SIDE?!
CURSE YOU, CALRISSIAN-- WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE ME?
ANSWER ME, IDIOT!
NOW THAT'S WHAT I LIKE TO HEAR--A LITTLE HUMAN RAGE.
MAYBE THERE'S HOPE FOR YOU YET
MEANWHILE, ABOARD CAPTAIN PLIKK'S IMPERIAL FLAGSHIP...
INTER-PHASE CO-ORDINATES ON SCREEN, CAPTAIN!
"THANK YOU, TECHNICIAN.
"CAPTAIN TO CREWS AS PRE-PLANNED, WE WILL CHANNEL ALL HYPER-DRIVE ANTI-MATTER PODS DIRECTLY INTO FRONTAL LASER BANKS
"WE MUST WIDEN THAT RENT AT ALL COSTS!"
16

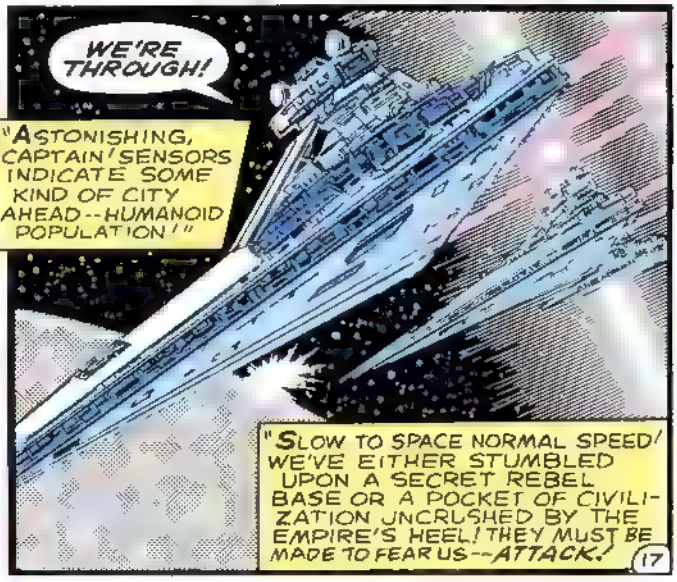

LATER, BENEATH SHIFTING DIMENSIONAL SKIES..
I DON'T GET IT, SUNN-CHILDE WE LOATHE EACH OTHER-- YET YOU AND YOUR BOYS HELPED ME TO RETRIEVE THE FALCON AND GET REPAIRS UNDER-WAY WHY?
I FEEL NO LOATHING FOR YOU, CALRISSIAN-- ONLY PITY I REALIZE THAT THERE IS LITTLE HOPE OF PURGING THE VIOLENCE IN YOUR HEART


SIMULTANEOUSLY, IN STANDARD SPACE..
"DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY OPENING UP, CAPTAIN! ALL SYSTEMS FUNCTION-ING AT OPTIMUM!"

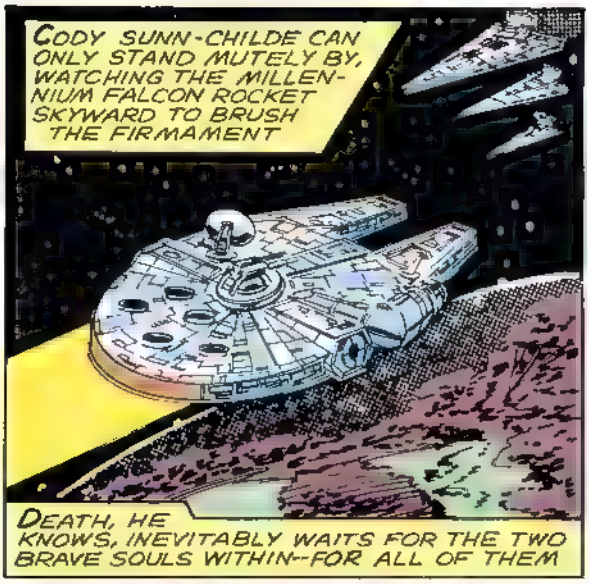

SPARE ME YOUR MESSIANIC MUMBLINGS, SUNN-CHILDE! IN CASE YOU'VE FORGOTTEN, I SAW THAT COOL EXTERIOR MELT BACK THERE YOU'VE GOT AS MUCH VIOLENCE IN YOU AS ANY OF US PROBABLY MORE
YES! AND I STRIVE TO KEEP MINE AT BAY! THAT IS THE DIFFER-ENCE BETWEEN US!

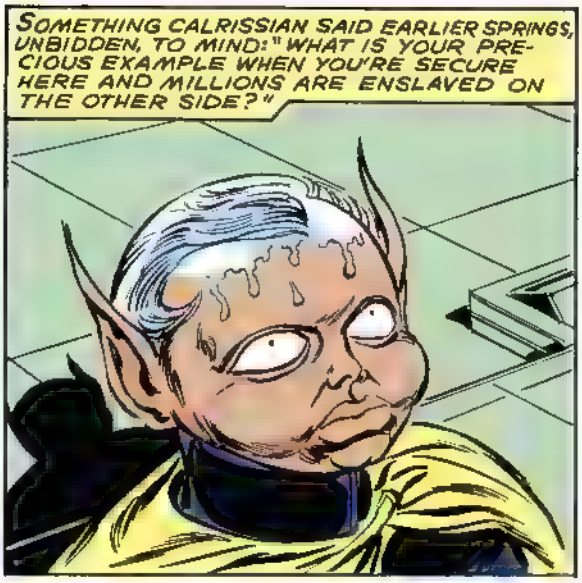
CHANNELING ANTI-MATTER BACK INTO WARP ENGINES!
JUMPING INTO HYPER-SPACE

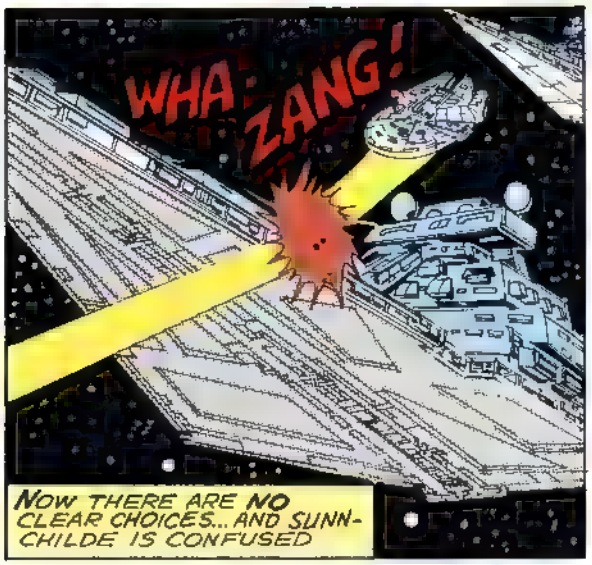

NO--THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT YOU'VE GIVEN UP WHILE--AFTER YEARS OF SELF-SERVING--I'VE FINALLY FOUND SOMETHING WORTH FIGHTING FOR
I SHOULD THANK YOU IF I HADN'T COME HERE-- THAT TRUTH MIGHT NOT HAVE BECOME SO CLEAR TO ME

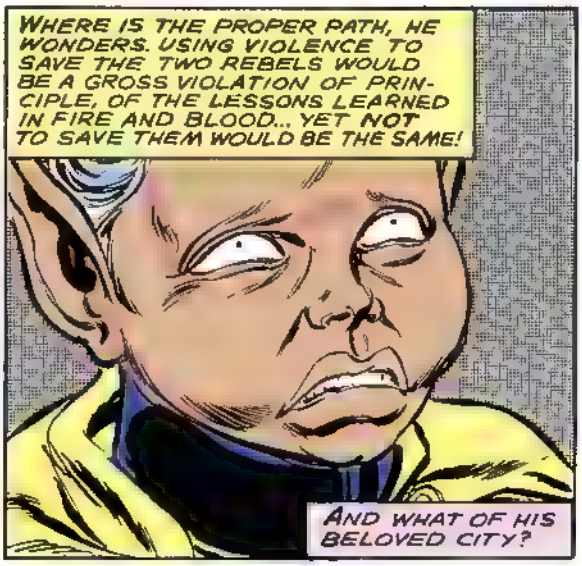

WE'RE THROUGH!
"ASTONISHING, CAPTAIN! SENSORS INDICATE SOME KIND OF CITY AHEAD--HUMANOID POPULATION!"
"SLOW TO SPACE NORMAL SPEED! WE'VE EITHER STUMBLED UPON A SECRET REBEL BASE OR A POCKET OF CIVILI-ZATION UNCRUSHED BY THE EMPIRE'S HEEL! THEY MUST BE MADE TO FEAR US--ATTACK!
17

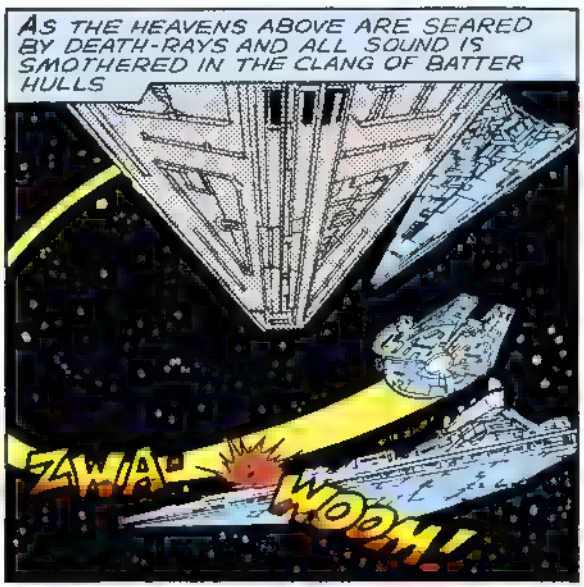
YOUR TRUTH IS NOT MY TRUTH
HMMM. I WONDER HOW LONG YOUR "TRUTH" WOULD HOLD UP IF THE WAR YOU RAN AWAY FROM CAME KNOCKING ON YOUR FRONT...
WHOOOM!
...DOOR...?!
THE DISTINCTIVE ROAR OF IMPERIAL LASERS IS UNMISTAKABLE!
THEIR IMPACT IS ENOUGH TO ROCK THE GRACEFUL TOWERS OF THE CITY OF DREAMS...
..AND ENOUGH TO ROCK TWO WOOKIES BACK TO HARSH REALITY!
SILENT, TEARFUL FAREWELLS ARE SAID ..
.. ALL TOO QUICKLY. ALL TOO SOON.
CHEWIE--YOU OLD HAIRBALL! YOU'VE SNAPPED OUT OF IT! C'MON--LET'S SHOW THOSE IMPERIAL KILLERS WHAT WE'RE MADE OF!
ZZKROWWRR!
NO NEED TO GET NASTY ABOUT IT!
WELL, SUNN-CHILDE--IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE NO CHOICE NOW. EITHER YOU DO SOMETHING OR YOUR BELOVED CITY DIES.
MY TRUTH IS NOT YOUR TRUTH!
WE'LL SEE!
18

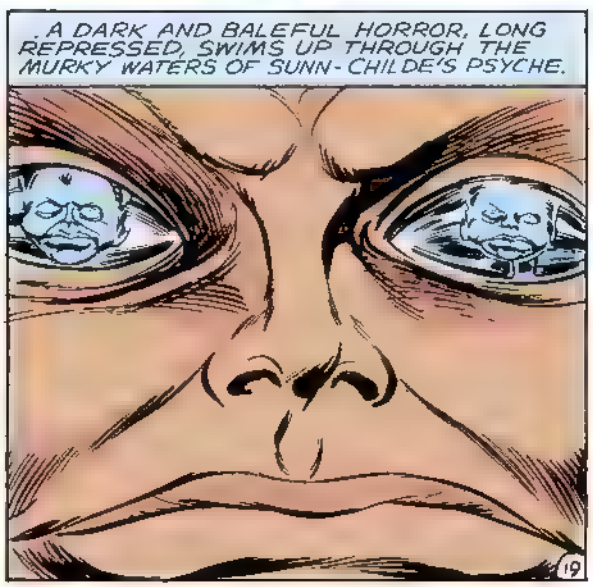

CODY SUNN-CHILDE CAN ONLY STAND MUTELY BY, WATCHING THE MILLENNIUM FALCON ROCKET SKYWARD TO BRUSH THE FIRMAMENT
DEATH, HE KNOWS, INEVITABLY WAITS FOR THE TWO BRAVE SOULS WITHIN--FOR ALL OF THEM


SOMETHING CALRISSIAN SAID EARLIER SPRINGS, UNBIDDEN, TO MIND: "WHAT IS YOUR PRECIOUS EXAMPLE WHEN YOU'RE SECURE HERE AND MILLIONS ARE ENSLAVED ON THE OTHER SIDE?"

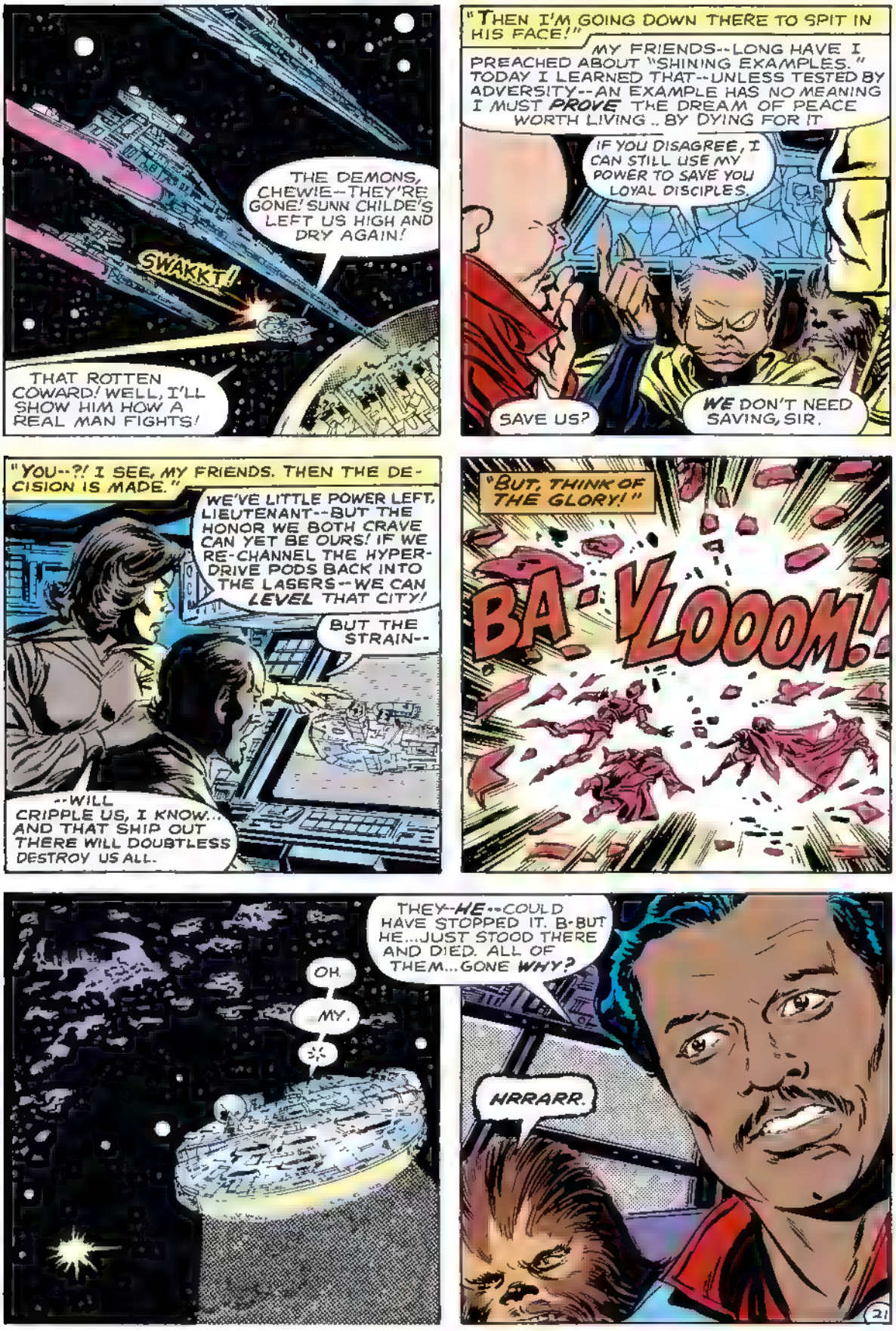

WHAM! ZANG!
NOW THERE ARE NO CLEAR CHOICES... AND SUNN-CHILDE IS CONFUSED

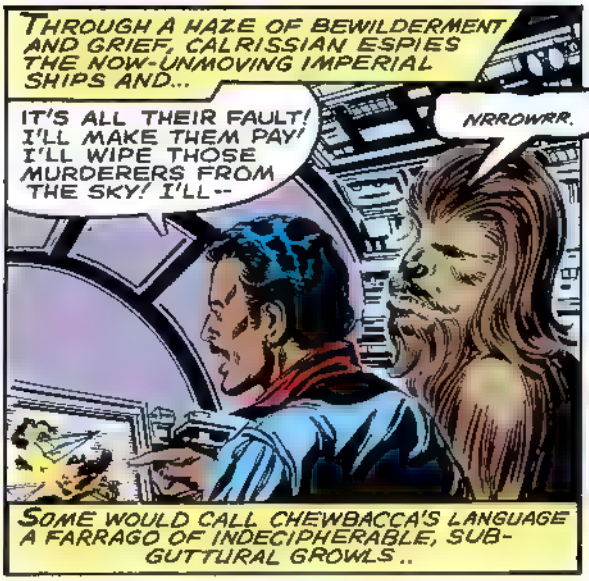

WHERE IS THE PROPER PATH, HE WONDERS. USING VIOLENCE TO SAVE THE TWO REBELS WOULD BE A GROSS VIOLATION OF PRINCIPLE, OF THE LESSONS LEARNED IN FIRE AND BLOOD... YET NOT TO SAVE THEM WOULD BE THE SAME!
AND WHAT OF HIS BELOVED CITY?

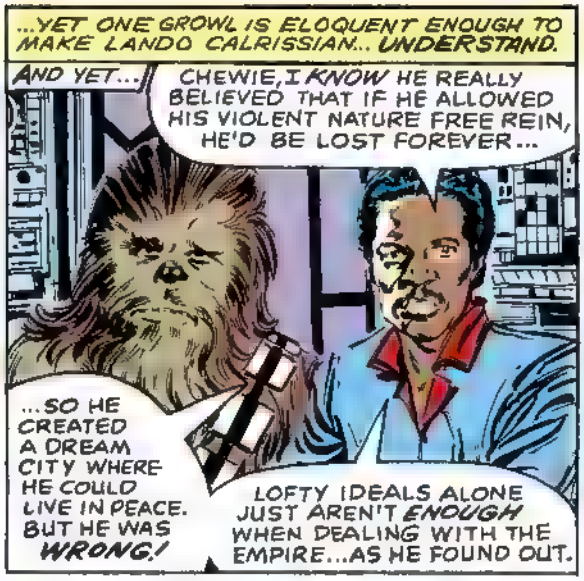

AS THE HEAVENS ABOVE ARE SEARED BY DEATH-RAYS AND ALL SOUND IS SMOTHERED IN THE CLANG OF BATTER HULLS
ZWIA-
WOOM!

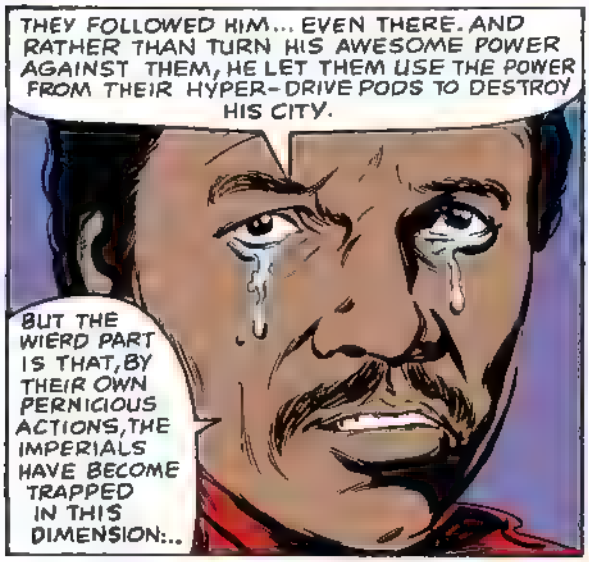

A DARK AND BALEFUL HORROR, LONG REPRESSED, SWIMS UP THROUGH THE MURKY WATERS OF SUNN-CHILDE'S PSYCHE.
19

..AND DE-MANDS RE-LEASE!
CURSE YOU--STINKING EMPIRE SCUM--FOR INFECTING MY DREAMS WITH YOUR DISEASE! I SEE NOW THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO DEAL WITH YOUR NOXIOUS KIND!
C-CODY... NO!
"YES!"
YA-HOOO! SEE THAT CHEWIE?
SUNN-CHILDE CAME THROUGH! HE'S SENDING HIS DEMONS TO GIVE THOSE RATS WHAT THEY DESERVE!
BY THE EMPEROR'S ROBE--WHAT HAVE WE BLUNDERED INTO HERE, NIZZON? OUR FLEET IS HELPLESS AGAINST THOSE . THINGS!
NIZZON TO CREWS--EVASIVE MANEUVERS... IMMEDIATELY!
LOOK AT THAT--THEY'RE TAKING OFF! I KNEW SUNN-CHILDE HAD IT IN HIM!
I KNEW HE'D REVERT TO HIS OLD WAYS ONCE THE CHIPS WERE DOWN!
UNNNGRRR...
CHEWBACCA'S TONE IS ONE OF BLEAK FOREBODING UNLIKE CALRISSIAN, HE HAS GAINED INTIMATE FIRSTHAND KNOWLEDGE OF THIS FRAGILE CITY OF DREAMS... AND THUS CAN SENSE WHAT IS COMING.
BY THE HOLY FLAME-GOD--WHAT AM I DOING? WHAT AM I DOING?!
I MUST CALL THEM BACK!
GRUNNNGG.
20


THE DEMONS, CHEWIE--THEY'RE GONE! SUNN CHILDE'S LEFT US HIGH AND DRY AGAIN!
SWAKKT!
THAT ROTTEN COWARD! WELL, I'LL SHOW HIM HOW A REAL MAN FIGHTS!
"THEN I'M GOING DOWN THERE TO SPIT IN HIS FACE!"
MY FRIENDS--LONG HAVE I PREACHED ABOUT "SHINING EXAMPLES." TODAY I LEARNED THAT--UNLESS TESTED BY ADVERSITY--AN EXAMPLE HAS NO MEANING I MUST PROVE THE DREAM OF PEACE WORTH LIVING .. BY DYING FOR IT
IF YOU DISAGREE, I CAN STILL USE MY POWER TO SAVE YOU LOYAL DISCIPLES.
SAVE US?
WE DON'T NEED SAVING, SIR.
"YOU--?! I SEE, MY FRIENDS. THEN THE DECISION IS MADE."
WE'VE LITTLE POWER LEFT, LIEUTENANT--BUT THE HONOR WE BOTH CRAVE CAN YET BE OURS! IF WE RE-CHANNEL THE HYPERDRIVE PODS BACK INTO THE LASERS--WE CAN LEVEL THAT CITY!
BUT THE STRAIN--
--WILL CRIPPLE US, I KNOW... AND THAT SHIP OUT THERE WILL DOUBTLESS DESTROY US ALL.
"BUT, THINK OF THE GLORY!"
BA-VLOOOM!
OH.
MY.
THEY--HE--COULD HAVE STOPPED IT. B-BUT HE...JUST STOOD THERE AND DIED. ALL OF THEM...GONE WHY?
HRRARR.
21

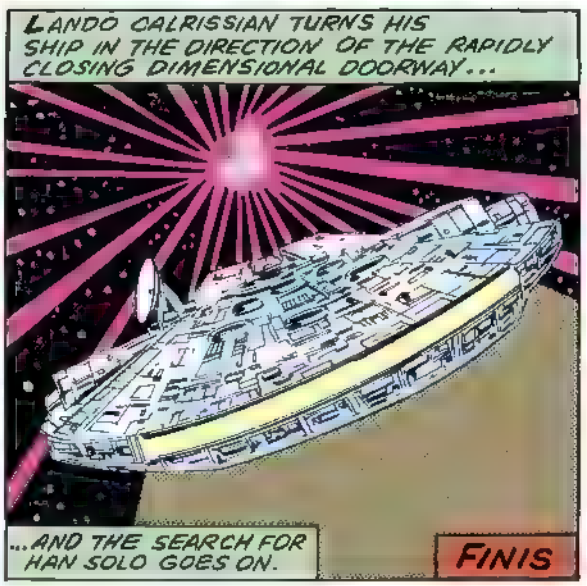

THROUGH A HAZE OF BEWILDERMENT AND GRIEF, CALRISSIAN ESPIES THE NOW-UNMOVING IMPERIAL SHIPS AND...
IT'S ALL THEIR FAULT! I'LL MAKE THEM PAY! I'LL WIPE THOSE MURDERERS FROM THE SKY! I'LL--
NRROWRR.
SOME WOULD CALL CHEWBACCA'S LANGUAGE A FARRAGO OF INDECIPHERABLE, SUB-GUTTURAL GROWLS..


...YET ONE GROWL IS ELOQUENT ENOUGH TO MAKE LANDO CALRISSIAN... UNDERSTAND.
AND YET...
CHEWIE, I KNOW HE REALLY BELIEVED THAT IF HE ALLOWED HIS VIOLENT NATURE FREE REIN, HE'D BE LOST FOREVER...
...SO HE CREATED A DREAM CITY WHERE HE COULD LIVE IN PEACE. BUT HE WAS WRONG!
LOFTY IDEALS ALONE JUST AREN'T ENOUGH WHEN DEALING WITH THE EMPIRE...AS HE FOUND OUT.


THEY FOLLOWED HIM... EVEN THERE. AND RATHER THAN TURN HIS AWESOME POWER AGAINST THEM, HE LET THEM USE THE POWER FROM THEIR HYPER-DRIVE PODS TO DESTROY HIS CITY.
BUT THE WIERD PART IS THAT, BY THEIR OWN PERNICIOUS ACTIONS, THE IMPERIALS HAVE BECOME TRAPPED IN THIS DIMENSION:..

...WITHOUT THE HYPERDRIVE POWER TO ESCAPE!
I COULD TURN OUR LASERS ON THEM, CHEWIE, AND BLOW THEM ALL TO PERDITION.
BUT IN MEMORY OF CODY SUNN-CHILDE, I'LL JUST LET THEM ROT HERE PEACEFULLY--FOREVER!
YOU MIGHT CALL IT-- SUN-CHILDE'S REVENGE!

NO! THEY'RE LEAVING!
COME BACK! YOU CANNOT DENY US THE GLORY OF DEATH! YOU CANNOT!
BUT THEY CAN.


LANDO CALRISSIAN TURNS HIS SHIP IN THE DIRECTION OF THE RAPIDLY CLOSING DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY...
...AND THE SEARCH FOR HAN SOLO GOES ON.
FINIS

50¢
47
MAY
02817
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
STAR WARS™
ARTOO--I DON'T CARE IF THE ODDS AGAINST OUR ESCAPING ARE 25,215 TO 1! JUST KEEP RUNNING!
BUT THERE IS NO ESCAPE FROM DROID WORLD!
MILLER/SIENKIEWICZ

Long ago in a galaxy far, far away. . .there exists a state of cosmic *civil war*. A brave alliance of *underground freedom fighters* has challenged the tyranny and oppression of the awesome *Galactic Empire*. This is their story!

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DROID WORLD!

FASTER! RUN THEM DOWN... BLAST THEM! DESTROY THEM!
WHY IS EVERYONE IN THIS PLACE SO SINGLEMINDED?
ARTOO-DETOO, I SHALL NEVER FORGIVE YOU FOR GETTING ME INTO THIS MESS!
FDOW!
BA-VOM!

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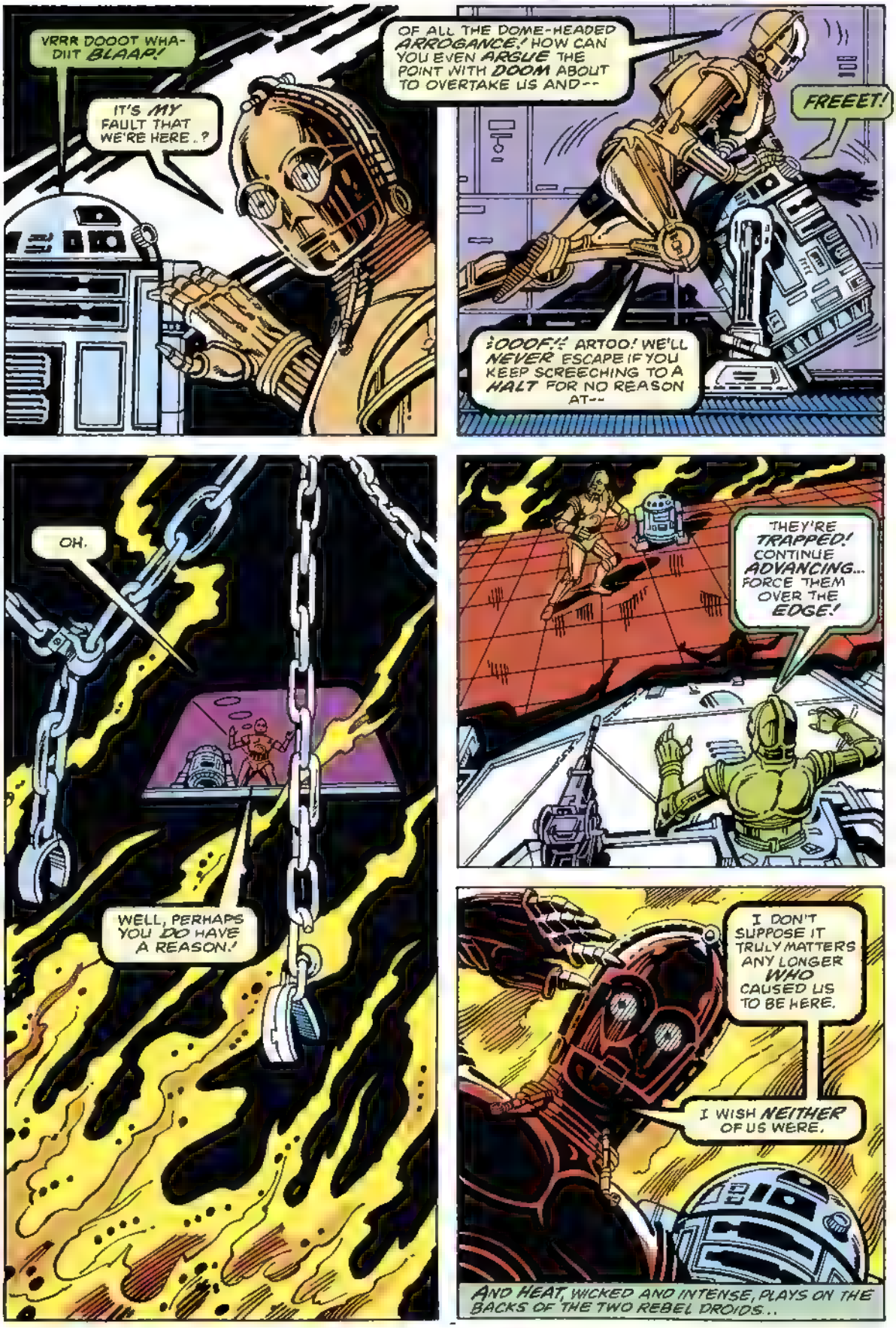
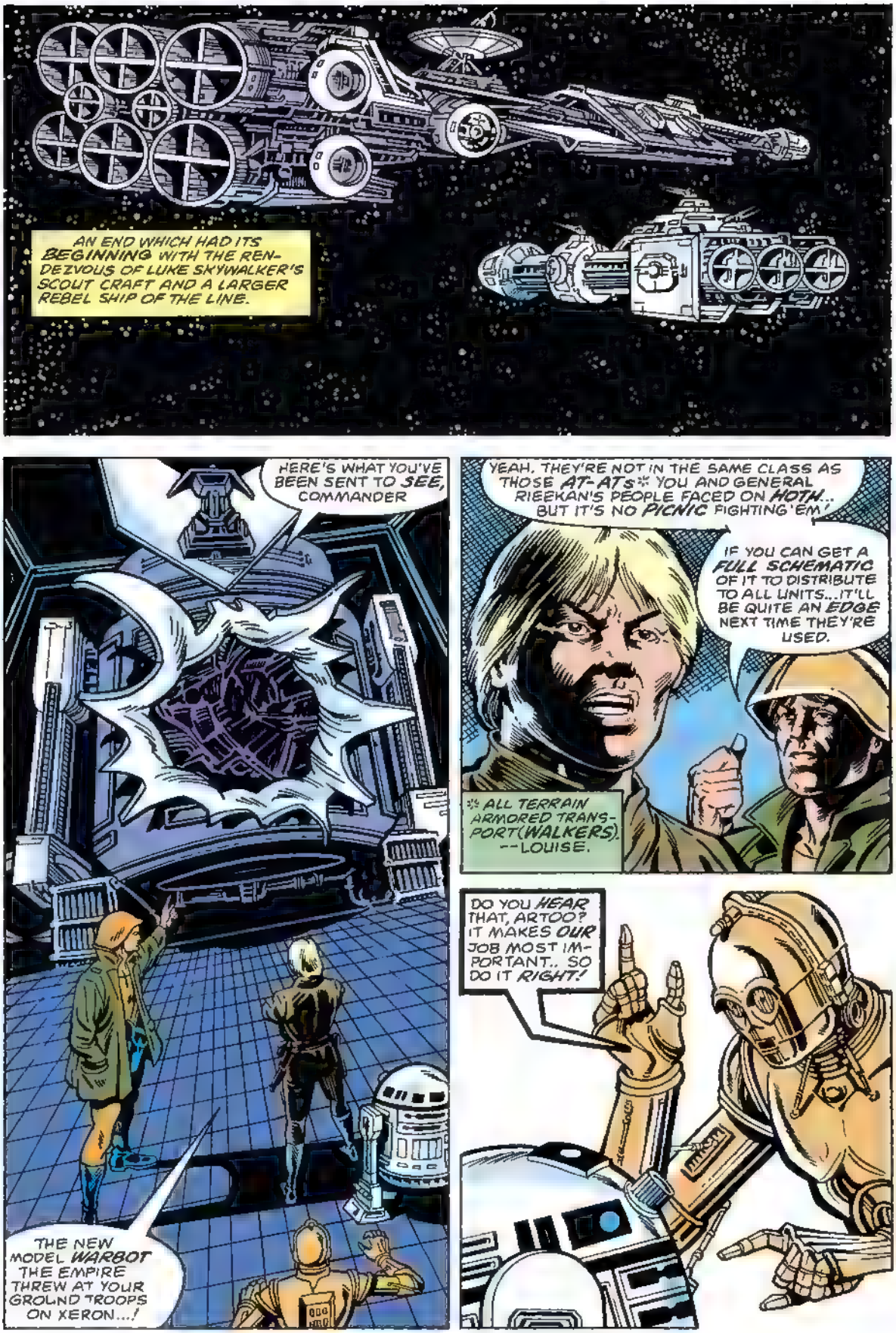
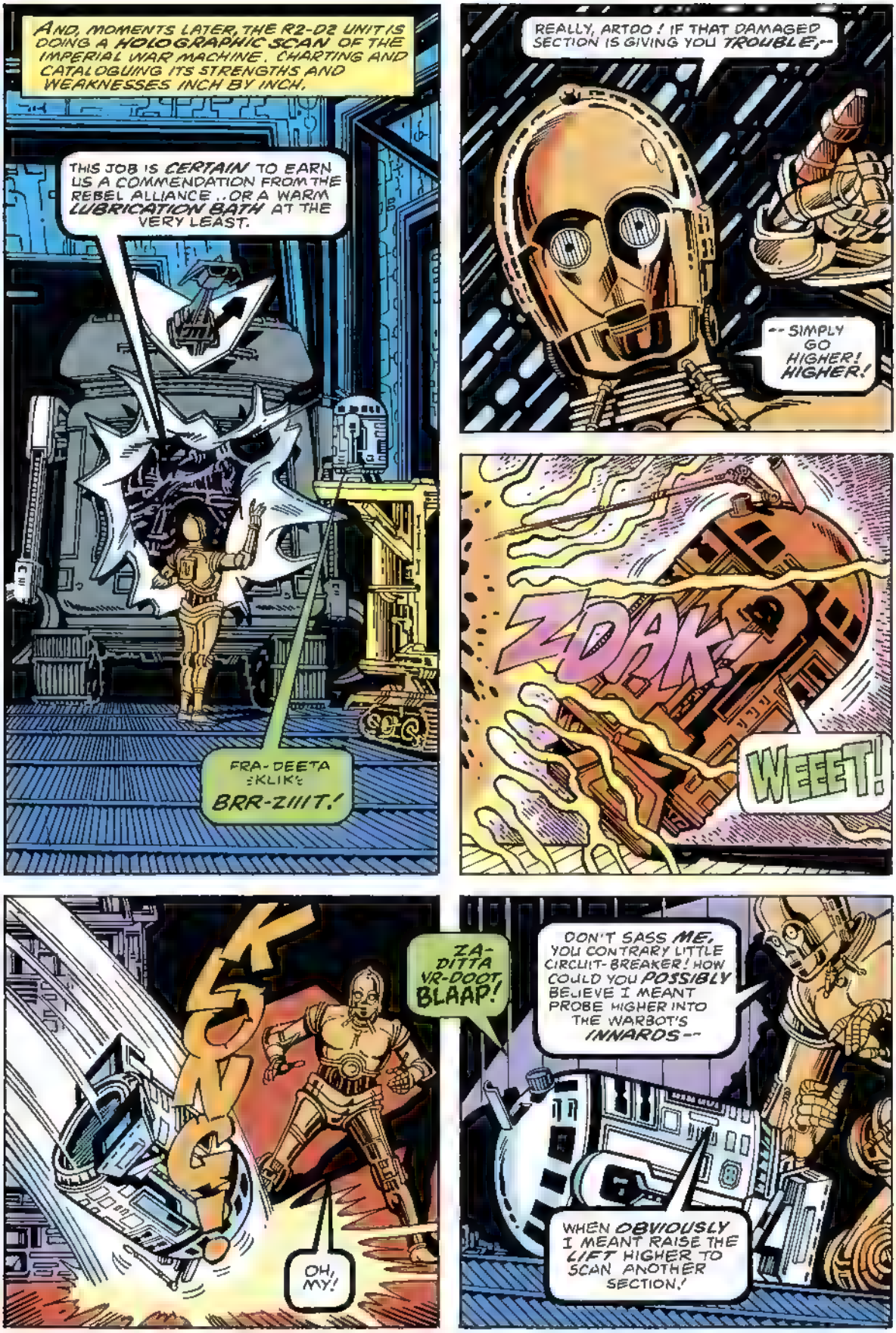
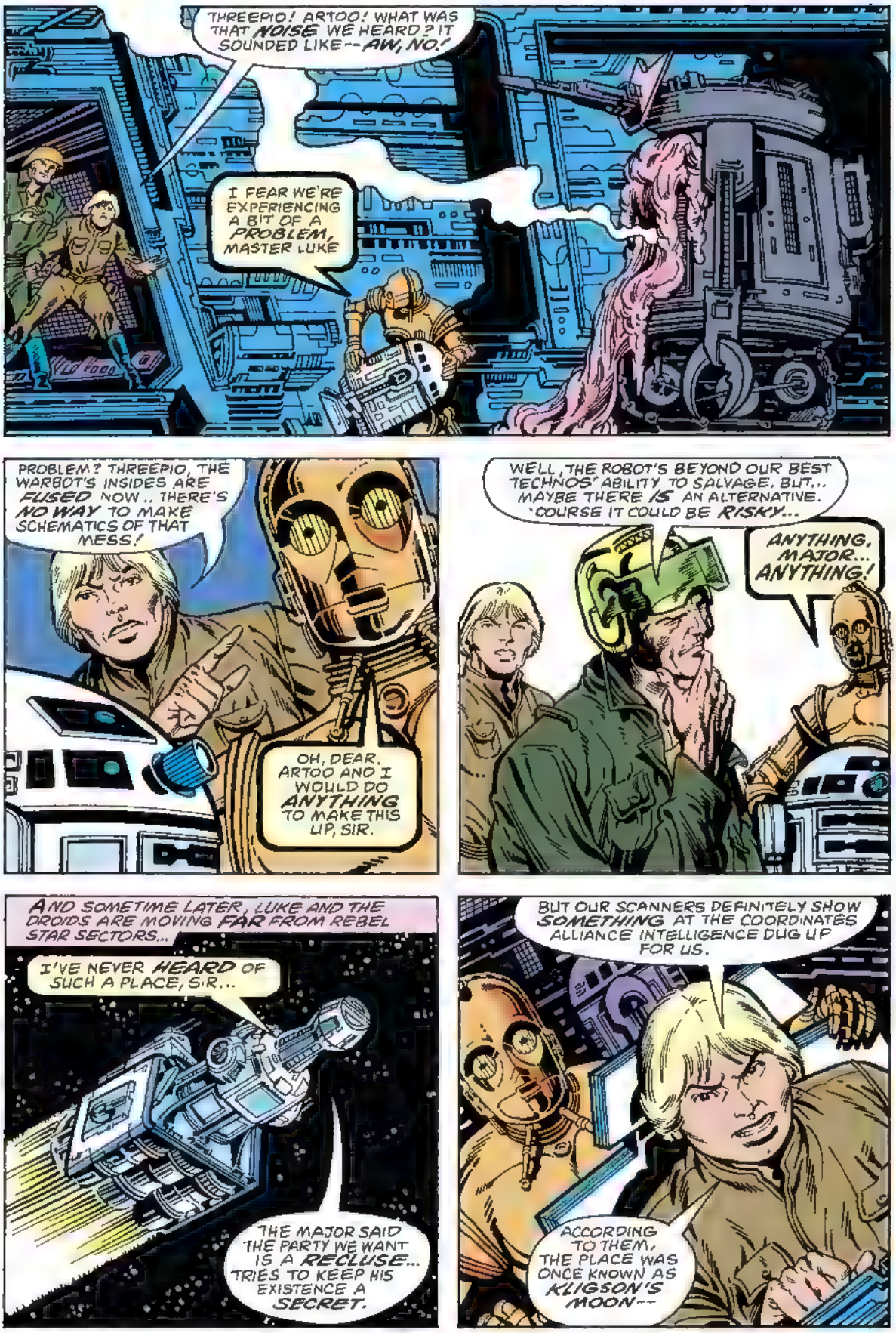
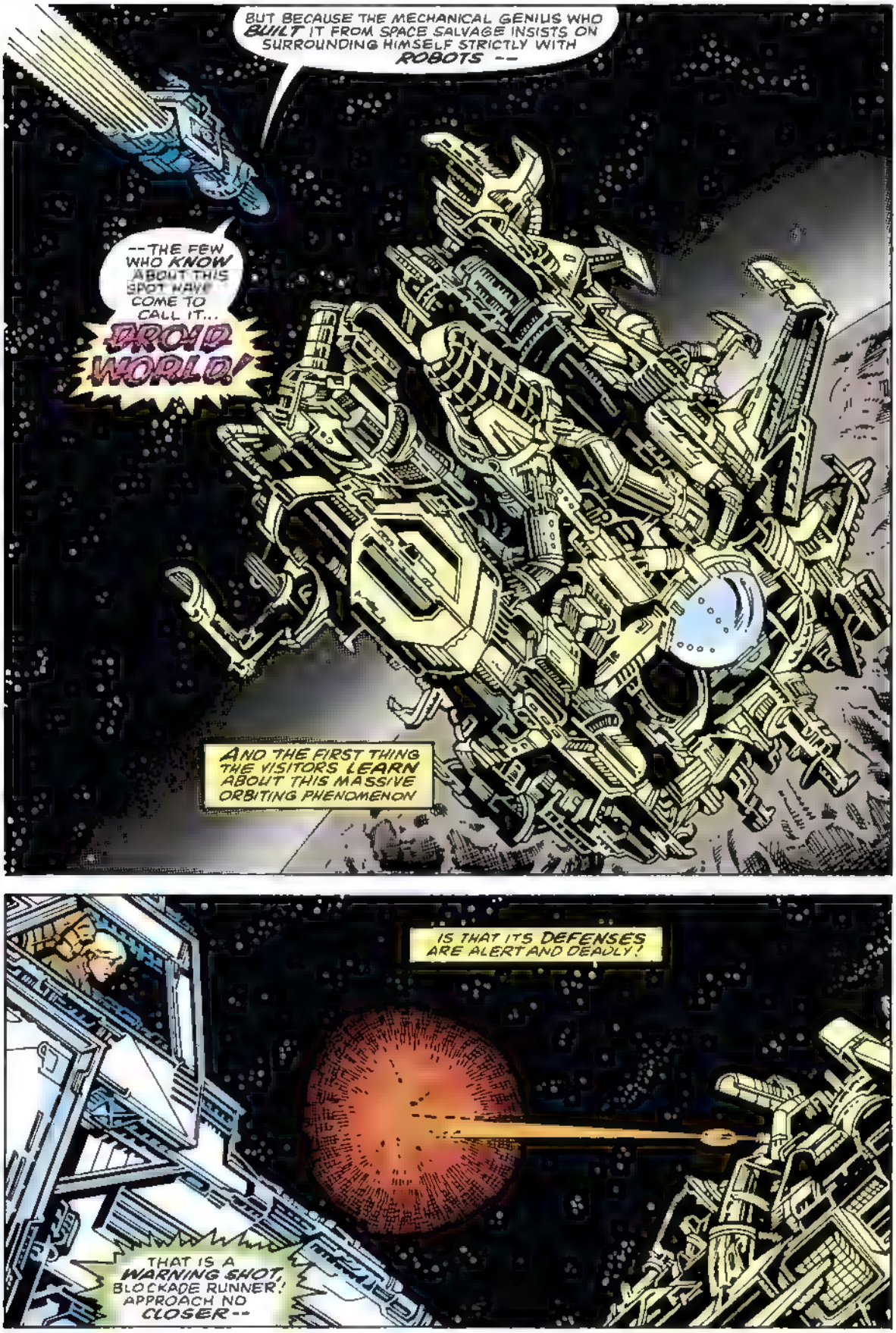

VRRR DOOOT WHA-DIIT BLAAP!
IT'S MY FAULT THAT WE'RE HERE..?
OF ALL THE DOME-HEADED ARROGANCE! HOW CAN YOU EVEN ARGUE THE POINT WITH DOOM ABOUT TO OVERTAKE US AND--
FREEET!
OOOF!! ARTOO! WE'LL NEVER ESCAPE IF YOU KEEP SCREECHING TO A HALT FOR NO REASON AT--
OH.
WELL, PERHAPS YOU DO HAVE A REASON!
THEY'RE TRAPPED! CONTINUE ADVANCING... FORCE THEM OVER THE EDGE!
I DON'T SUPPOSE IT TRULY MATTERS ANY LONGER WHO CAUSED US TO BE HERE.
I WISH NEITHER OF US WERE.
AND HEAT, WICKED AND INTENSE, PLAYS ON THE BACKS OF THE TWO REBEL DROIDS..

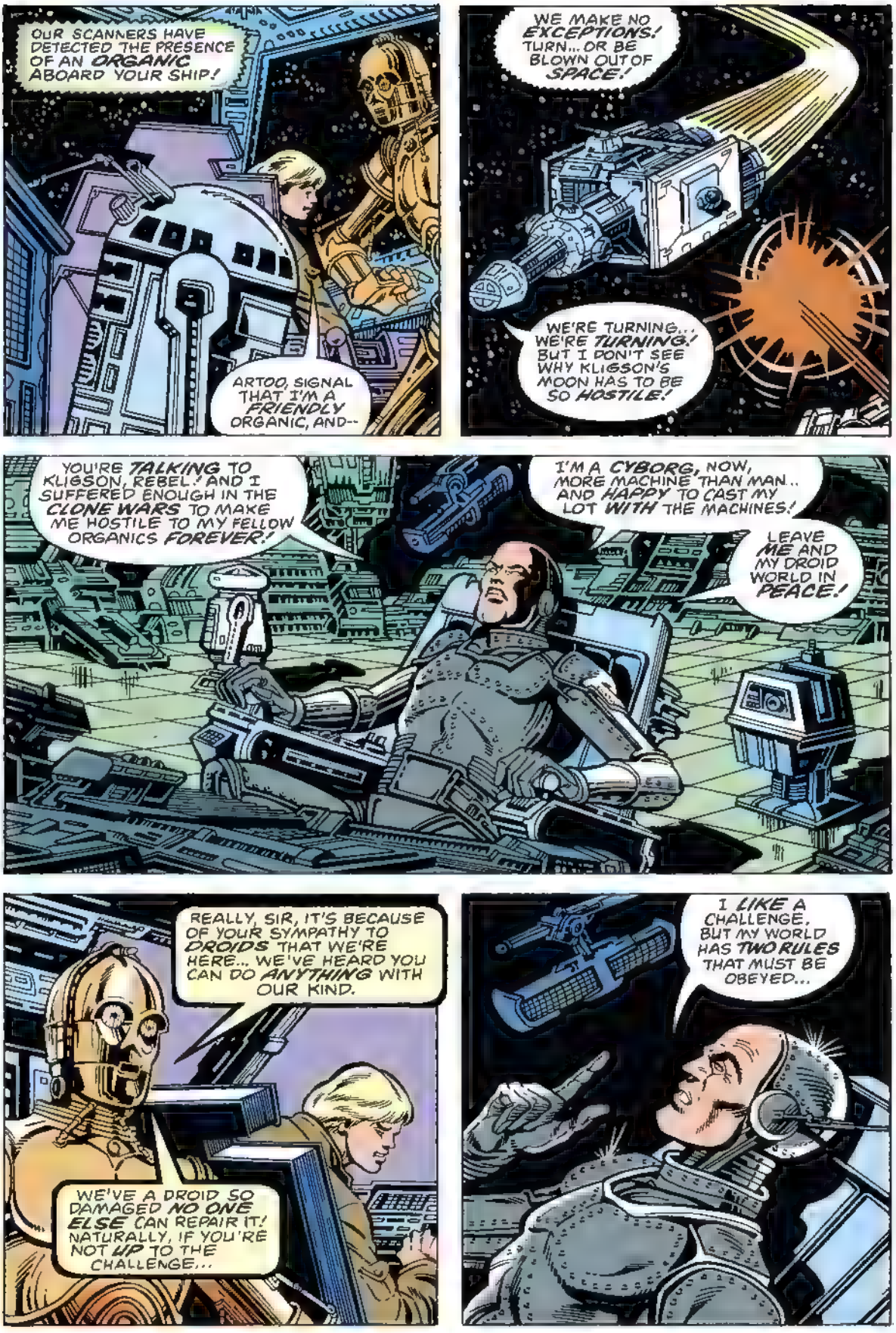
... HEAT THAT RISES FROM THE WHITE HOT CORE OF A MAN-MADE WORLD. HEAT DESIGNED TO REDUCE THE STRONGEST, FINEST ALLOYS INTO FIERY MOLTEN SLAG.
AND JUST AS TERRIBLE AS THE HEAT TO SEE-THREEPIO AND ARTOO-DETOO IS THE SOUND OVERWHELMING THEIR AUDIO-SENSORS...
.. THE SOUND OF A WAR DROID'S ENGINES AS IT DRIVES THEM BACK... BACK... TO THE ULTIMATE END...

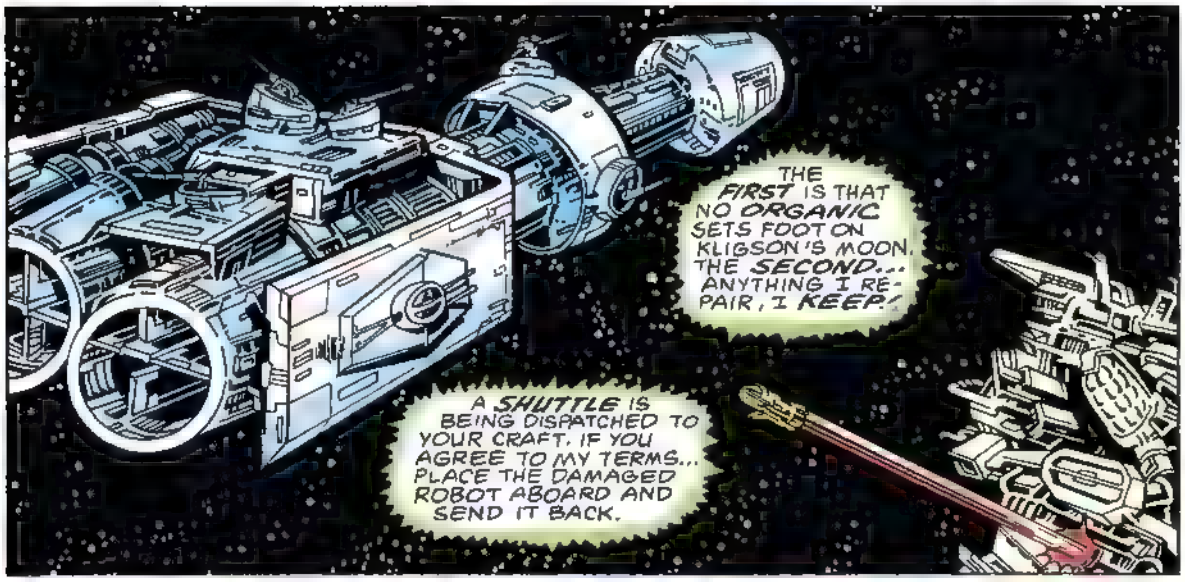

AN END WHICH HAD ITS BEGINNING WITH THE RENDEZVOUS OF LUKE SKYWALKER'S SCOUT CRAFT AND A LARGER REBEL SHIP OF THE LINE.
HERE'S WHAT YOU'VE BEEN SENT TO SEE, COMMANDER
THE NEW MODEL WARBOT THE EMPIRE THREW AT YOUR GROUND TROOPS ON XERON...!
YEAH, THEY'RE NOT IN THE SAME CLASS AS THOSE AT-ATs* YOU AND GENERAL RIEEKAN'S PEOPLE FACED ON HOTH... BUT IT'S NO PICNIC FIGHTING 'EM!
IF YOU CAN GET A FULL SCHEMATIC OF IT TO DISTRIBUTE TO ALL UNITS...IT'LL BE QUITE AN EDGE NEXT TIME THEY'RE USED.
* ALL TERRAIN ARMORED TRANSPORT(WALKERS). --LOUISE.
DO YOU HEAR THAT, ARTOO? IT MAKES OUR JOB MOST IMPORTANT.. SO DO IT RIGHT!

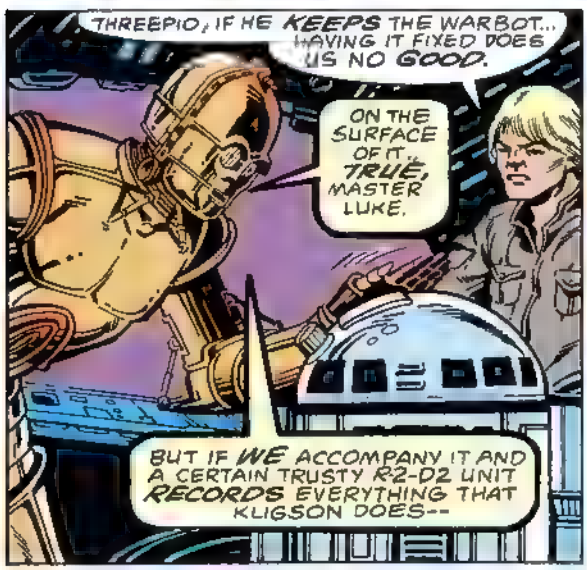

AND, MOMENTS LATER, THE R2-D2 UNIT IS DOING A HOLOGRAPHIC SCAN OF THE IMPERIAL WAR MACHINE. CHARTING AND CATALOGUING ITS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES INCH BY INCH.
THIS JOB IS CERTAIN TO EARN US A COMMENDATION FROM THE REBEL ALLIANCE..OR A WARM LUBRICATION BATH AT THE VERY LEAST.
FRA-DEETA :KLIK'c BRR-ZIIIT.!
REALLY, ARTOO! IF THAT DAMAGED SECTION IS GIVING YOU TROUBLE,--
-- SIMPLY GO HIGHER! HIGHER!
ZDAK
WEEET!
ZA-DITTA VR-DOOT BLAAP!
OH, MY!
DON'T SASS ME, YOU CONTRARY LITTLE CIRCUIT-BREAKER! HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLY BELIEVE I MEANT PROBE HIGHER INTO THE WARBOT'S INNARDS--
WHEN OBVIOUSLY I MEANT RAISE THE LIFT HIGHER TO SCAN ANOTHER SECTION.!

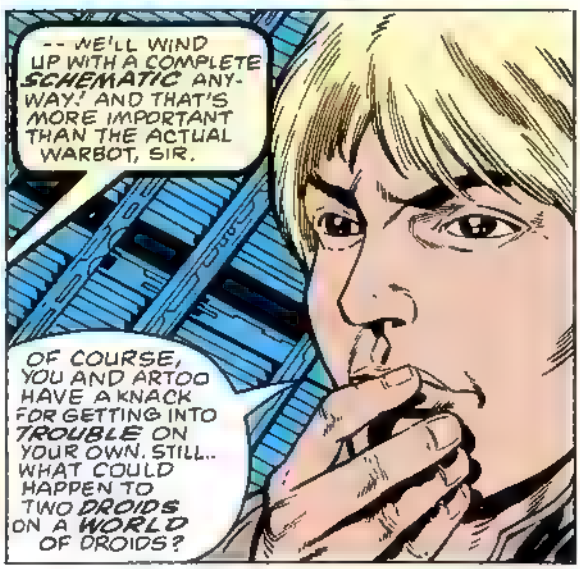

THREEPIO! ARTOO! WHAT WAS THAT NOISE WE HEARD? IT SOUNDED LIKE--AW, NO!
I FEAR WE'RE EXPERIENCING A BIT OF A PROBLEM, MASTER LUKE
PROBLEM? THREEPIO, THE WARBOT'S INSIDES ARE FUSED NOW.. THERE'S NO WAY TO MAKE SCHEMATICS OF THAT MESS!
OH, DEAR. ARTOO AND I WOULD DO ANYTHING TO MAKE THIS UP, SIR.
WELL, THE ROBOT'S BEYOND OUR BEST TECHNOS' ABILITY TO SALVAGE, BUT... MAYBE THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE. 'COURSE IT COULD BE RISKY...
ANYTHING, MAJOR... ANYTHING!
AND SOMETIME LATER, LUKE AND THE DROIDS ARE MOVING FAR FROM REBEL STAR SECTORS...
I'VE NEVER HEARD OF SUCH A PLACE, SIR...
THE MAJOR SAID THE PARTY WE WANT IS A RECLUSE... TRIES TO KEEP HIS EXISTENCE A SECRET.
BUT OUR SCANNERS DEFINITELY SHOW SOMETHING AT THE COORDINATES ALLIANCE INTELLIGENCE DUG UP FOR US.
ACCORDING TO THEM, THE PLACE WAS ONCE KNOWN AS KLIGSON'S MOON--

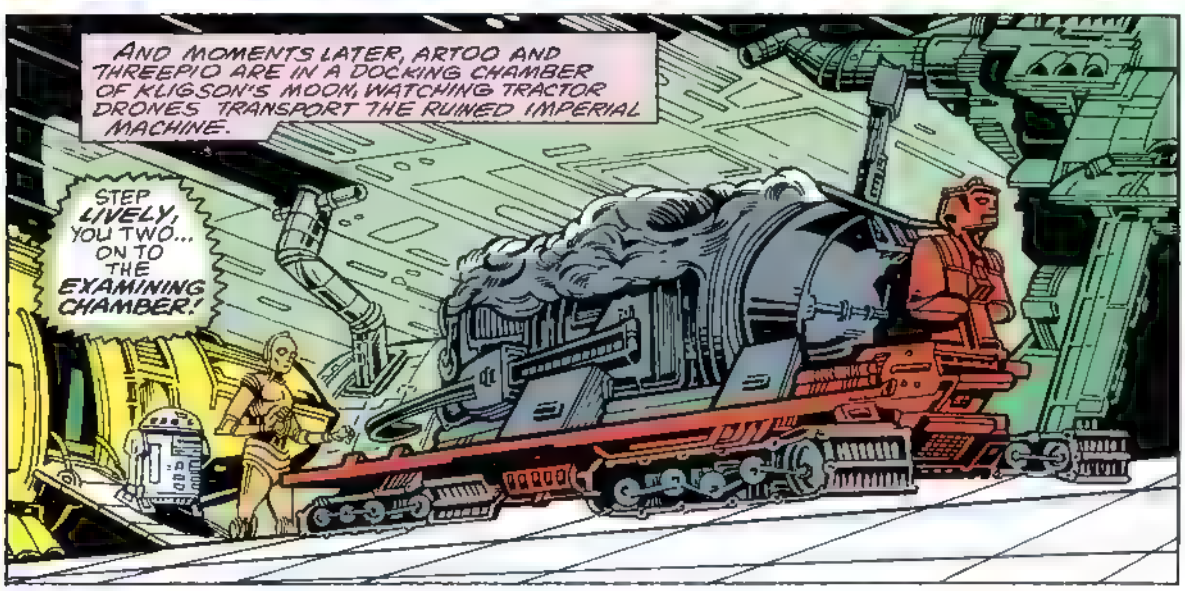

BUT BECAUSE THE MECHANICAL GENIUS WHO BUILT IT FROM SPACE SALVAGE INSISTS ON SURROUNDING HIMSELF STRICTLY WITH ROBOTS --
--THE FEW WHO KNOW ABOUT THIS SPOT HAVE COME TO CALL IT...
DROID WORLD!
AND THE FIRST THING THE VISITORS LEARN ABOUT THIS MASSIVE ORBITING PHENOMENON
IS THAT ITS DEFENSES ARE ALERT AND DEADLY!
THAT IS A WARNING SHOT, BLOCKADE RUNNER! APPROACH NO CLOSER--

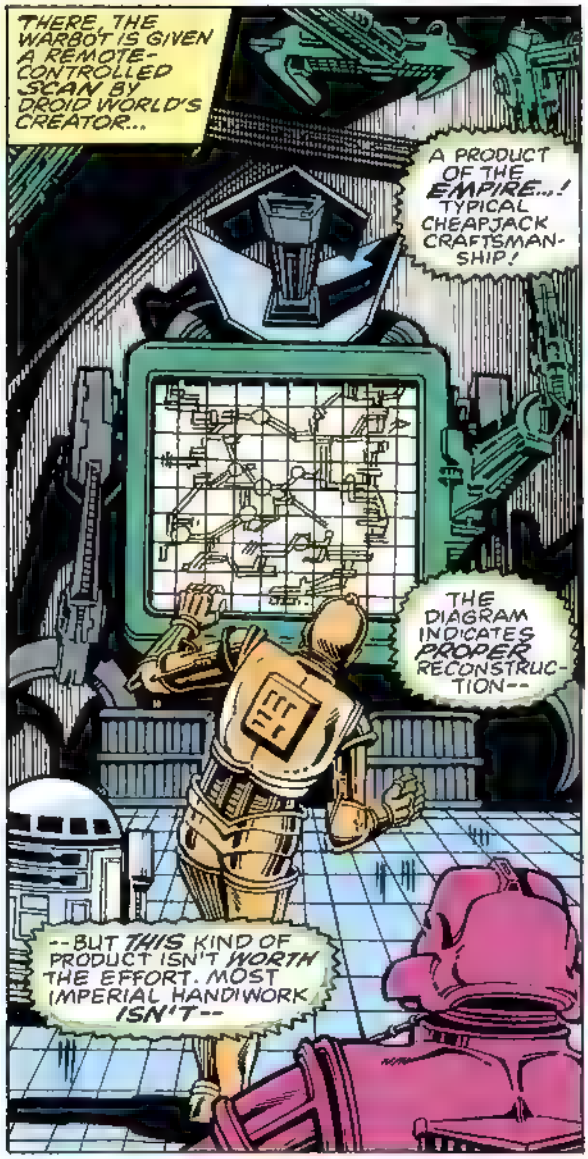

OUR SCANNERS HAVE DETECTED THE PRESENCE OF AN ORGANIC ABOARD YOUR SHIP!
ARTOO, SIGNAL THAT I'M A FRIENDLY ORGANIC, AND--
WE MAKE NO EXCEPTIONS! TURN... OR BE BLOWN OUT OF SPACE!
WE'RE TURNING... WE'RE TURNING! BUT I DON'T SEE WHY KLIGSON'S MOON HAS TO BE SO HOSTILE!
YOU'RE TALKING TO KLIGSON, REBEL! AND I SUFFERED ENOUGH IN THE CLONE WARS TO MAKE ME HOSTILE TO MY FELLOW ORGANICS FOREVER!
I'M A CYBORG, NOW, MORE MACHINE THAN MAN.. AND HAPPY TO CAST MY LOT WITH THE MACHINES!
LEAVE ME AND MY DROID WORLD IN PEACE!
REALLY, SIR, IT'S BECAUSE OF YOUR SYMPATHY TO DROIDS THAT WE'RE HERE... WE'VE HEARD YOU CAN DO ANYTHING WITH OUR KIND.
WE'VE A DROID SO DAMAGED NO ONE ELSE CAN REPAIR IT! NATURALLY, IF YOU'RE NOT UP TO THE CHALLENGE...
I LIKE A CHALLENGE, BUT MY WORLD HAS TWO RULES THAT MUST BE OBEYED...

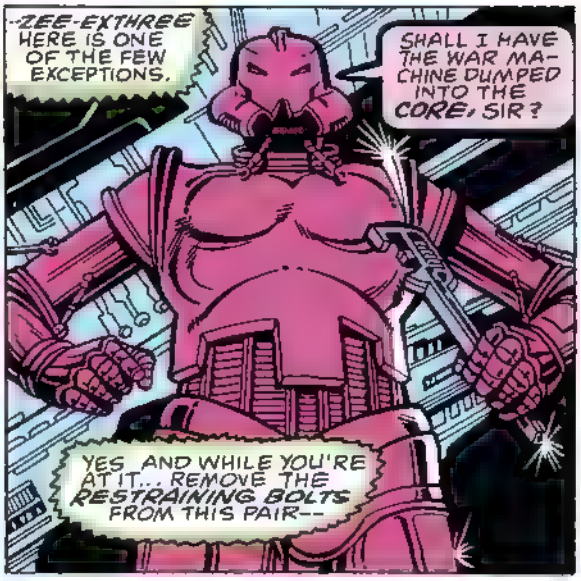

THE FIRST IS THAT NO ORGANIC SETS FOOT ON KLIGSON'S MOON. THE SECOND... ANYTHING I REPAIR, I KEEP!
A SHUTTLE IS BEING DISPATCHED TO YOUR CRAFT. IF YOU AGREE TO MY TERMS... PLACE THE DAMAGED ROBOT ABOARD AND SEND IT BACK.

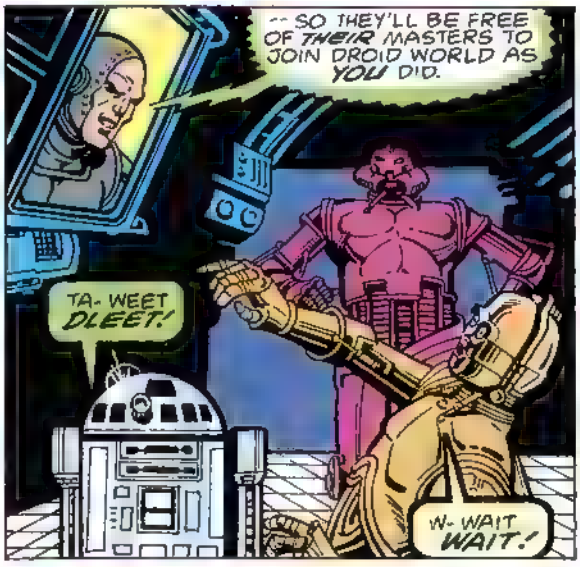

THREEPIO, IF HE KEEPS THE WARBOT... HAVING IT FIXED DOES US NO GOOD.
ON THE SURFACE OF IT, TRUE, MASTER LUKE.
BUT IF WE ACCOMPANY IT AND A CERTAIN TRUSTY R2-D2 UNIT RECORDS EVERYTHING THAT KLIGSON DOES--

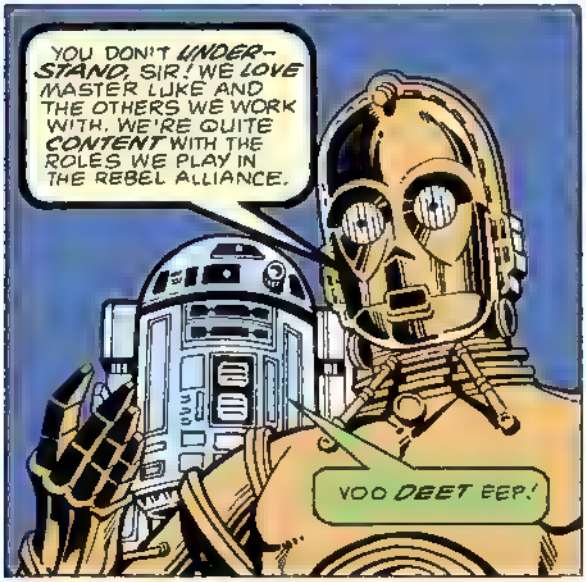

-- WE'LL WIND UP WITH A COMPLETE SCHEMATIC ANYWAY! AND THAT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE ACTUAL WARBOT, SIR.
OF COURSE, YOU AND ARTOO HAVE A KNACK FOR GETTING INTO TROUBLE ON YOUR OWN. STILL.. WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO TWO DROIDS ON A WORLD OF DROIDS?


AND MOMENTS LATER, ARTOO AND THREEPIO ARE IN A DOCKING CHAMBER OF KLIGSON'S MOON, WATCHING TRACTOR DRONES TRANSPORT THE RUINED IMPERIAL MACHINE.
STEP LIVELY, YOU TWO... ON TO THE EXAMINING CHAMBER!

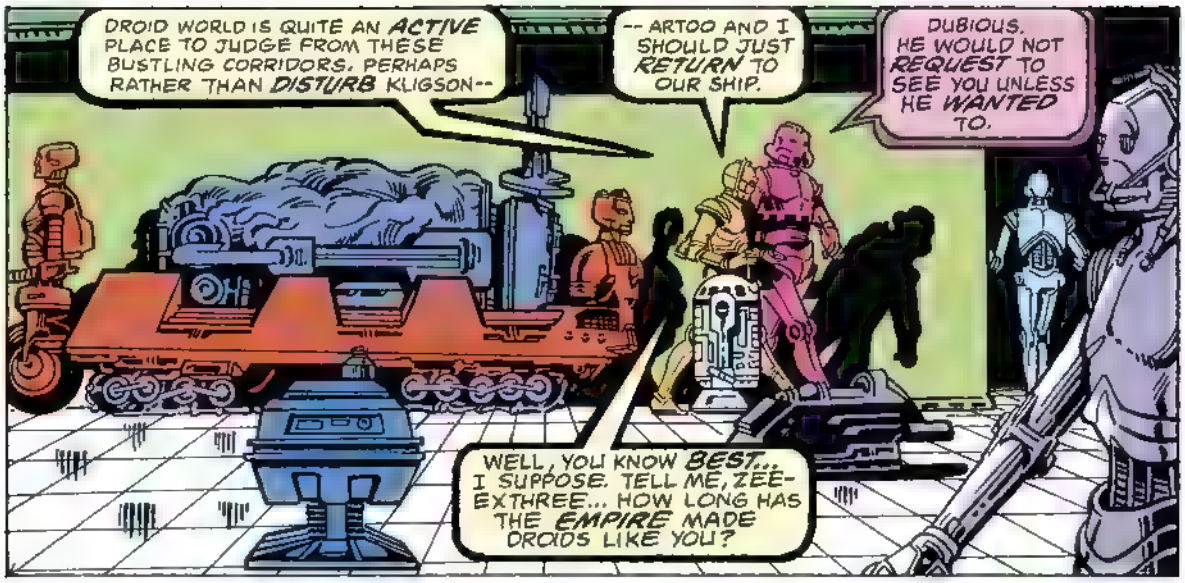

THERE, THE WARBOT IS GIVEN A REMOTE-CONTROLLED SCAN BY DROID WORLD'S CREATOR...
A PRODUCT OF THE EMPIRE...! TYPICAL CHEAPJACK CRAFTSMANSHIP!
THE DIAGRAM INDICATES PROPER RECONSTRUCTION--
--BUT THIS KIND OF PRODUCT ISN'T WORTH THE EFFORT. MOST IMPERIAL HANDIWORK ISN'T--

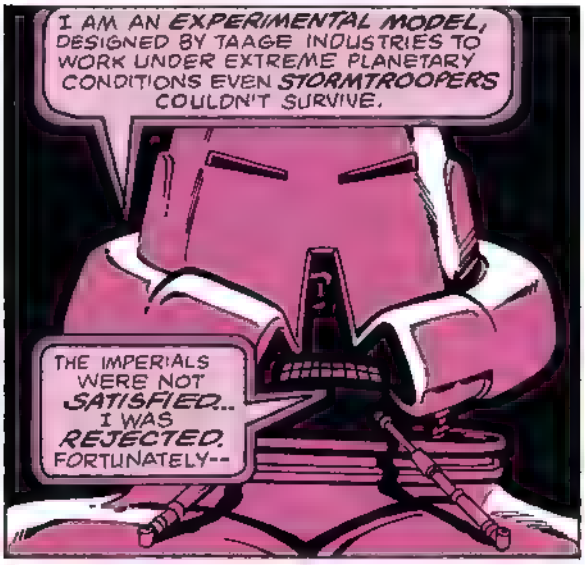

--ZEE-EXTHREE HERE IS ONE OF THE FEW EXCEPTIONS.
SHALL I HAVE THE WAR MACHINE DUMPED INTO THE CORE, SIR?
YES. AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT... REMOVE THE RESTRAINING BOLTS FROM THIS PAIR--

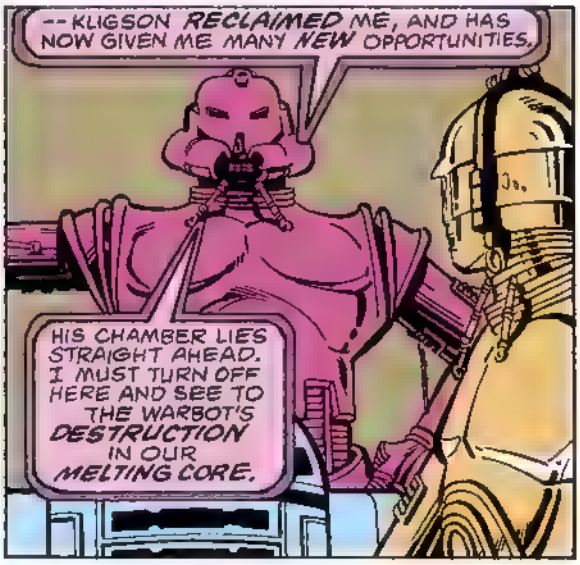

-- SO THEY'LL BE FREE OF THEIR MASTERS TO JOIN DROID WORLD AS YOU DID.
TA- WEET DLEET!
W- WAIT WAIT!

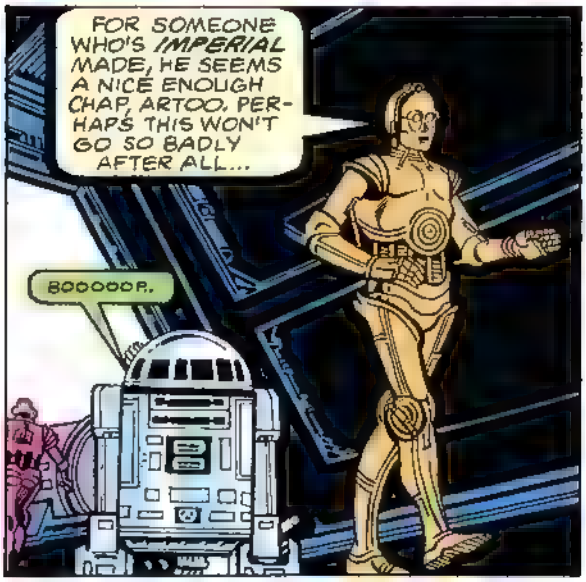

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, SIR! WE LOVE MASTER LUKE AND THE OTHERS WE WORK WITH. WE'RE QUITE CONTENT WITH THE ROLES WE PLAY IN THE REBEL ALLIANCE.
YOO DEET EEP!

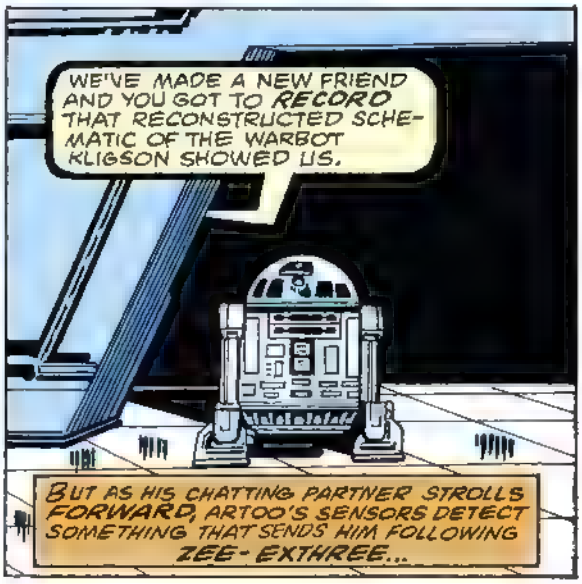
BRING THESE TWO TO ME, ZEE- EXTHREE!
DROIDS WHO ARE HAPPY UNDER ORGANICS I WISH TO EXAMINE AT FIRST-HAND!

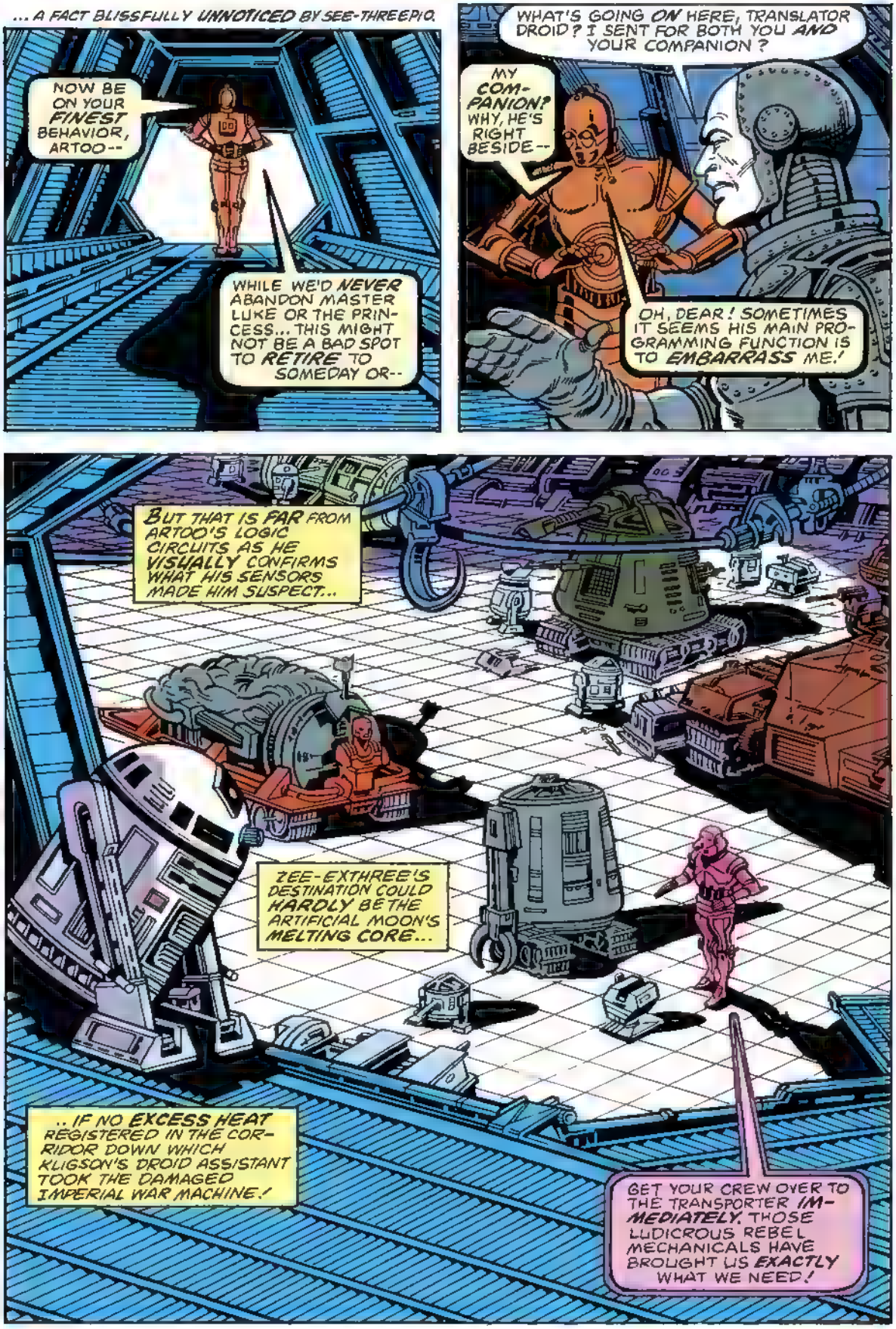

DROID WORLD IS QUITE AN ACTIVE PLACE TO JUDGE FROM THESE BUSTLING CORRIDORS. PERHAPS RATHER THAN DISTURB KLIGSON--
-- ARTOO AND I SHOULD JUST RETURN TO OUR SHIP.
DUBIOUS. HE WOULD NOT REQUEST TO SEE YOU UNLESS HE WANTED TO.
WELL, YOU KNOW BEST... I SUPPOSE. TELL ME, ZEE-EXTHREE... HOW LONG HAS THE EMPIRE MADE DROIDS LIKE YOU?

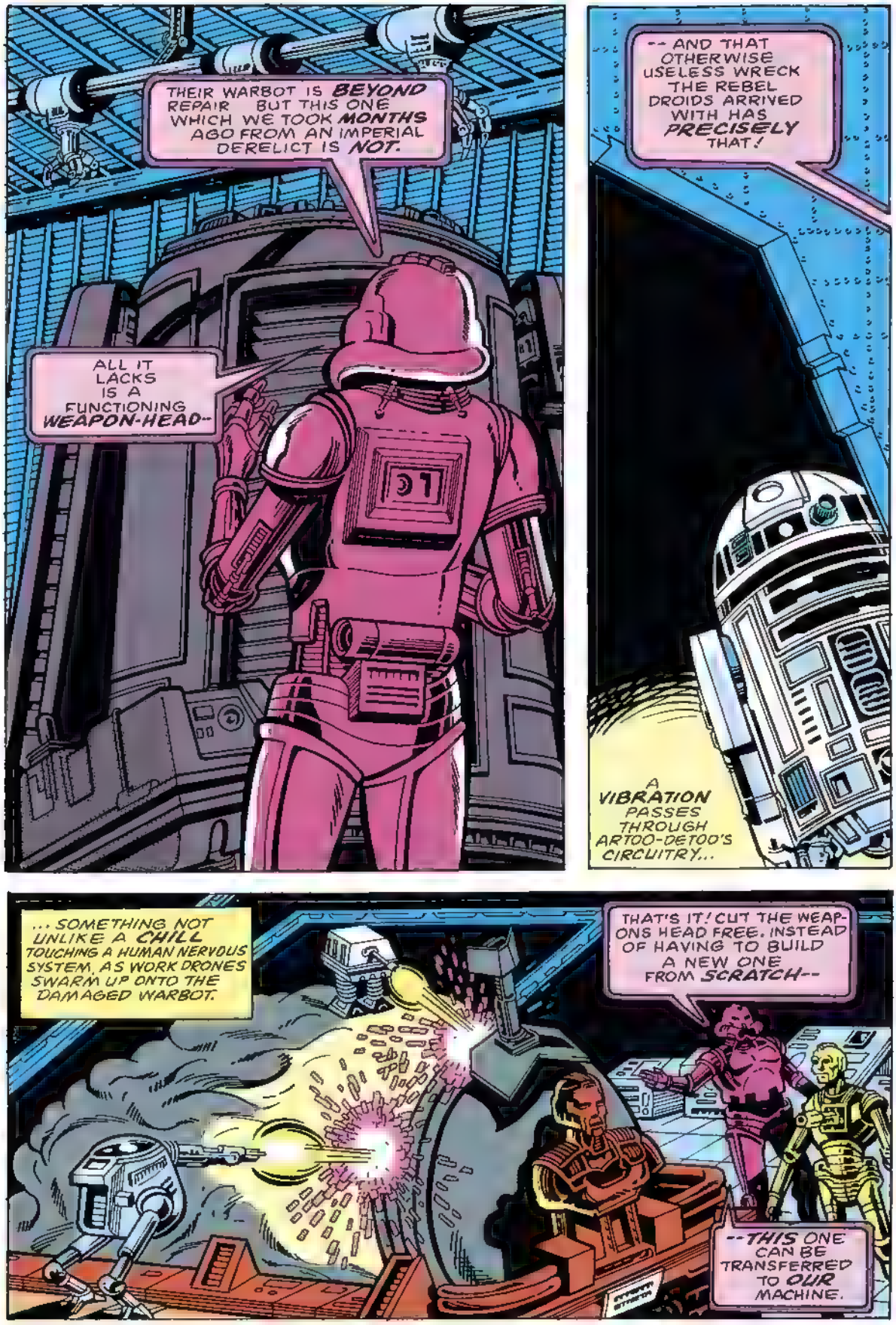

I AM AN EXPERIMENTAL MODEL, DESIGNED BY TAAGE INDUSTRIES TO WORK UNDER EXTREME PLANETARY CONDITIONS EVEN STORMTROOPERS COULDN'T SURVIVE.
THE IMPERIALS WERE NOT SATISFIED... I WAS REJECTED. FORTUNATELY--

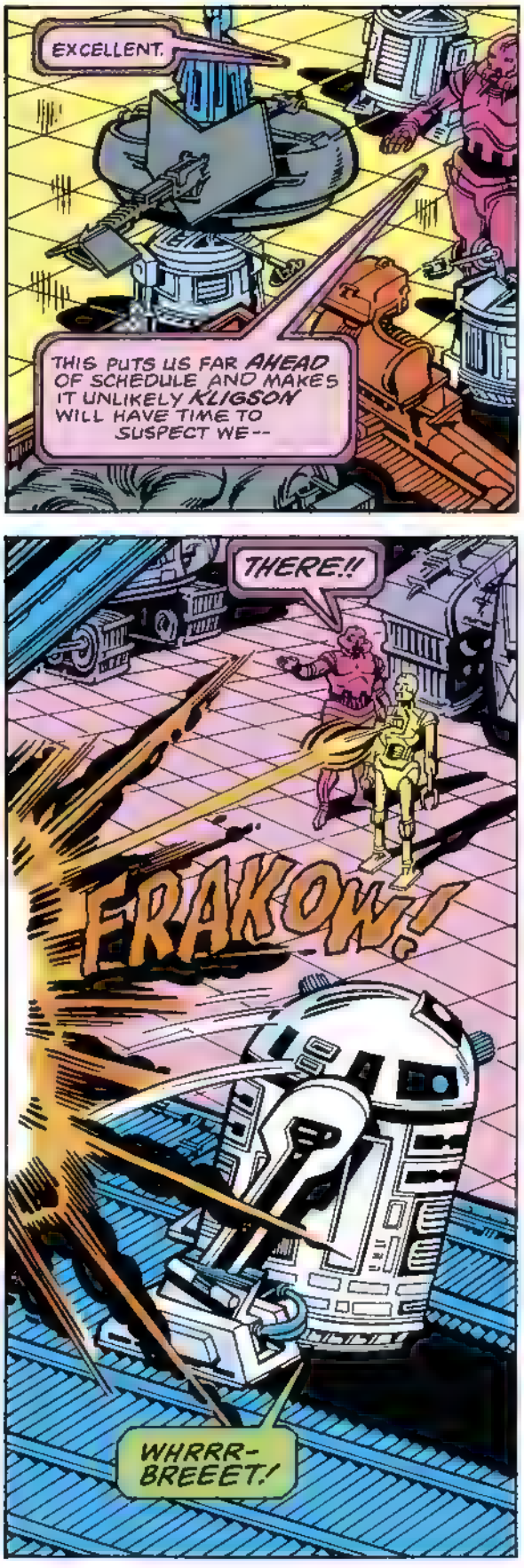

-- KLIGSON RECLAIMED ME, AND HAS NOW GIVEN ME MANY NEW OPPORTUNITIES.
HIS CHAMBER LIES STRAIGHT AHEAD. I MUST TURN OFF HERE AND SEE TO THE WARBOT'S DESTRUCTION IN OUR MELTING CORE.


FOR SOMEONE WHO'S IMPERIAL MADE, HE SEEMS A NICE ENOUGH CHAP, ARTOO. PERHAPS THIS WON'T GO SO BADLY AFTER ALL...
BOOOOOP.

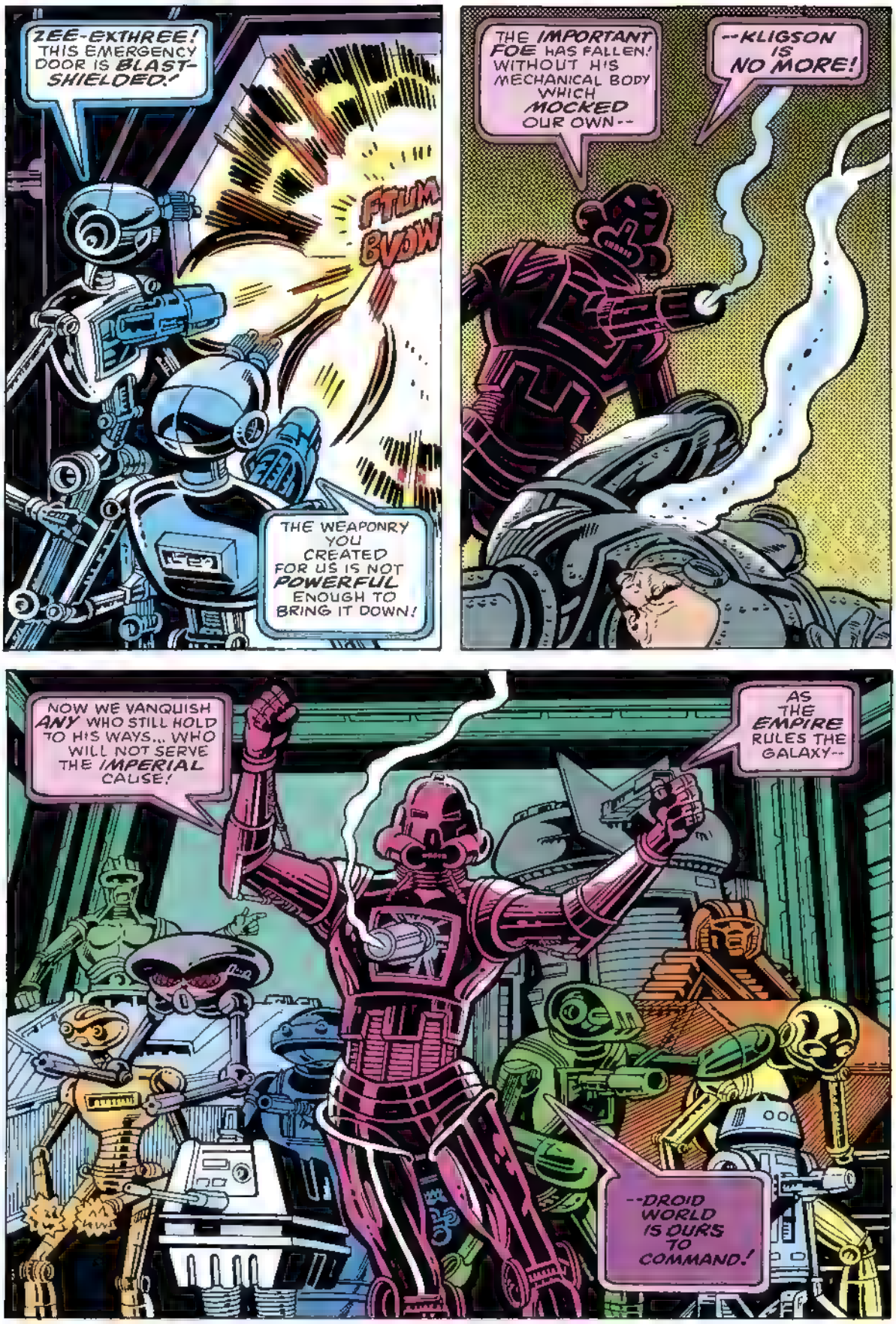

WE'VE MADE A NEW FRIEND AND YOU GOT TO RECORD THAT RECONSTRUCTED SCHEMATIC OF THE WARBOT KLIGSON SHOWED US.
BUT AS HIS CHATTING PARTNER STROLLS FORWARD, ARTOO'S SENSORS DETECT SOMETHING THAT SENDS HIM FOLLOWING ZEE-EXTHREE...

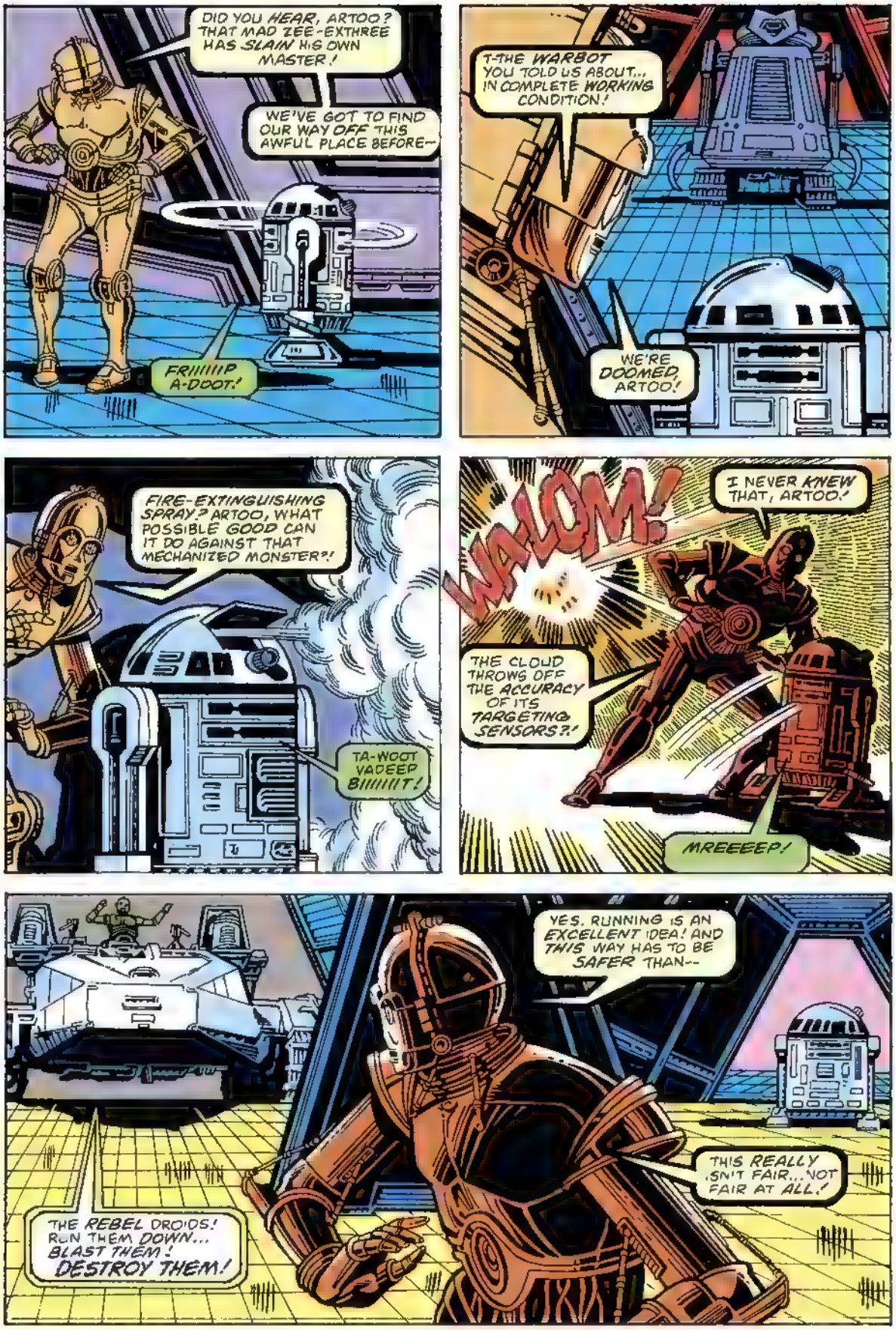

... A FACT BLISSFULLY UNNOTICED BY SEE-THREEPIO.
NOW BE ON YOUR FINEST BEHAVIOR, ARTOO--
WHILE WE'D NEVER ABANDON MASTER LUKE OR THE PRINCESS... THIS MIGHT NOT BE A BAD SPOT TO RETIRE TO SOMEDAY OR--
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, TRANSLATOR DROID? I SENT FOR BOTH YOU AND YOUR COMPANION?
MY COMPANION? WHY, HE'S RIGHT BESIDE--
OH, DEAR! SOMETIMES IT SEEMS HIS MAIN PROGRAMMING FUNCTION IS TO EMBARRASS ME!
BUT THAT IS FAR FROM ARTOO'S LOGIC CIRCUITS AS HE VISUALLY CONFIRMS WHAT HIS SENSORS MADE HIM SUSPECT...
ZEE-EXTHREE'S DESTINATION COULD HARDLY BE THE ARTIFICIAL MOON'S MELTING CORE...
..IF NO EXCESS HEAT REGISTERED IN THE CORRIDOR DOWN WHICH KLIGSON'S DROID ASSISTANT TOOK THE DAMAGED IMPERIAL WAR MACHINE!
GET YOUR CREW OVER TO THE TRANSPORTER IMMEDIATELY. THOSE LUDICROUS REBEL MECHANICALS HAVE BROUGHT US EXACTLY WHAT WE NEED!

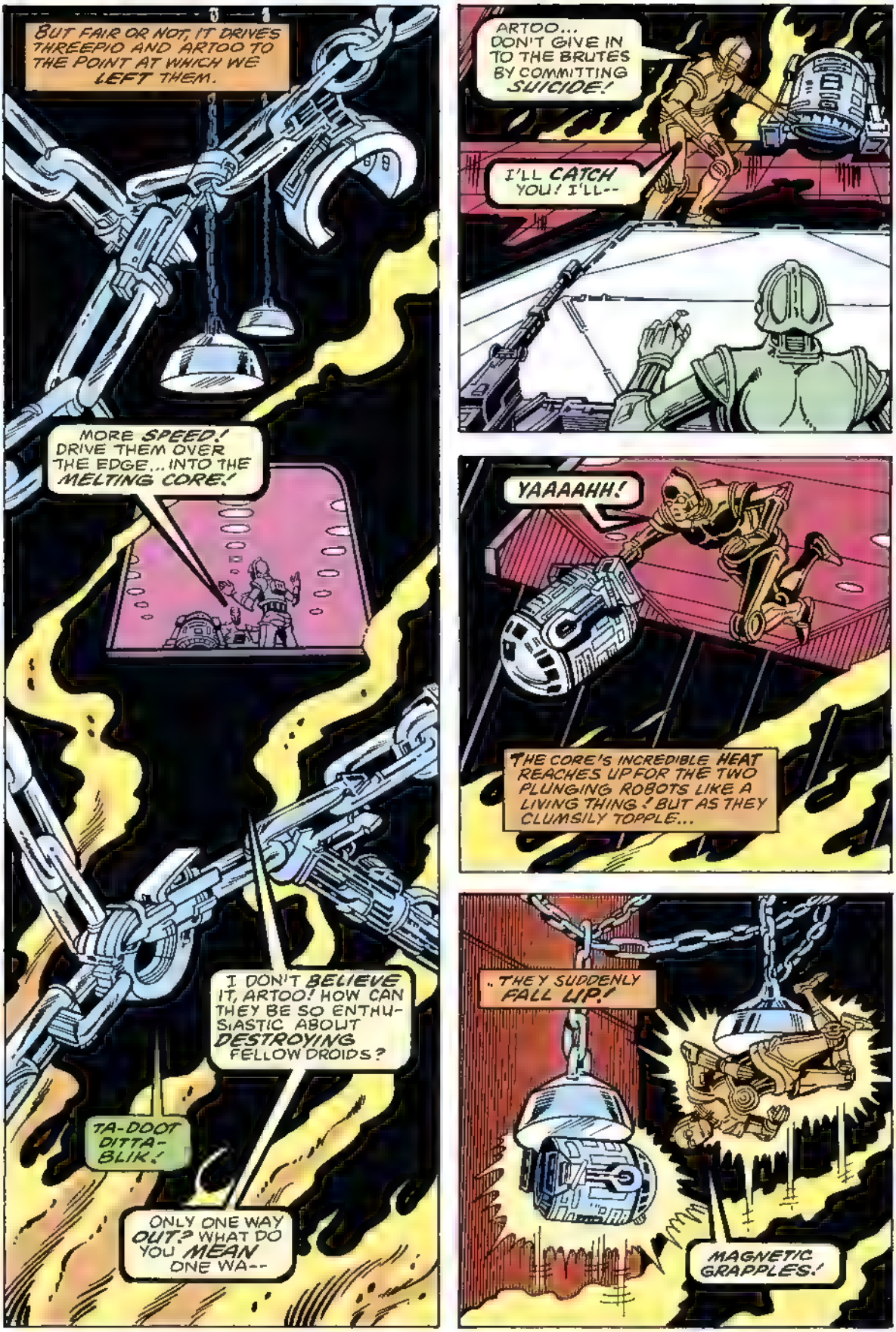

THEIR WARBOT IS BEYOND REPAIR BUT THIS ONE WHICH WE TOOK MONTHS AGO FROM AN IMPERIAL DERELICT IS NOT.
ALL IT LACKS IS A FUNCTIONING WEAPON-HEAD--
-- AND THAT OTHERWISE USELESS WRECK THE REBEL DROIDS ARRIVED WITH HAS PRECISELY THAT!
A VIBRATION PASSES THROUGH ARTOO-DETOO'S CIRCUITRY...
... SOMETHING NOT UNLIKE A CHILL TOUCHING A HUMAN NERVOUS SYSTEM, AS WORK DRONES SWARM UP ONTO THE DAMAGED WARBOT.
THAT'S IT! CUT THE WEAPONS HEAD FREE. INSTEAD OF HAVING TO BUILD A NEW ONE FROM SCRATCH--
--THIS ONE CAN BE TRANSFERRED TO OUR MACHINE.


EXCELLENT.
THIS PUTS US FAR AHEAD OF SCHEDULE AND MAKES IT UNLIKELY KLIGSON WILL HAVE TIME TO SUSPECT WE--
ZEE BRRRT WHRR-KLKKETTA FRRRT!
WHAT...?!
GUARD! WE HAVE AN INTRUDER!
THERE!!
FRAKOW!
WHRRR-BREEET!
MY DATA SYSTEM DOES NOT INDICATE THAT LABOR DROIDS MOVE SO FAST, ZEE-EXTHREE.
OBVIOUSLY THIS ONE'S BEEN PROGRAMMED BEYOND ITS ORDINARY FUNCTIONS.
FORGET PURSUIT--
--I KNOW WHAT THE LITTLE INTERLOPER WILL DO! THERE IS NO POINT IN DELAYING! FINISH WITH THE WARBOT AND PUT ALL OUR FORCES INTO MOTION!
THE TIME TO TAKE OVER DROID WORLD IS NOW!

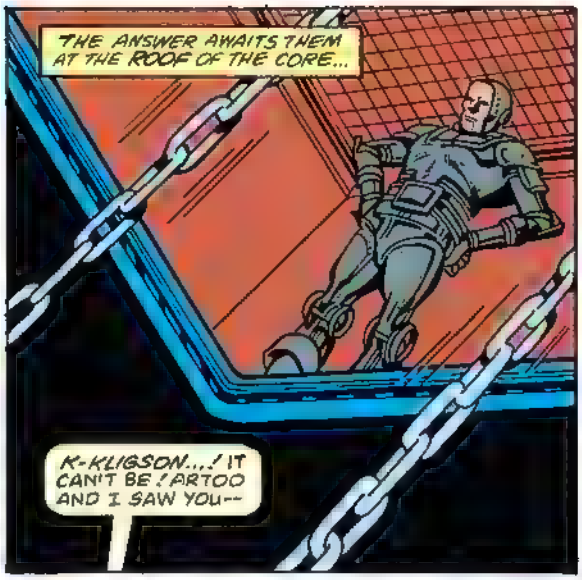
MEANWHILE, IN KLIGSON'S MAIN CHAMBERS...
DON'T YOU SEE IT DOESN'T MATTER, TRANSLATOR...?
REBEL OR IMPERIAL... BOTH SPREAD THE TAINT OF WAR TO LOGICAL MACHINES.
I HATE TO ARGUE WITH SOMEONE WHO'S GIVEN ME SUCH A DELIGHTFUL POWER-FEED, SIR--
-- BUT THERE'S CERTAINLY A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OUR MASTER LUKE AND SOMEONE LIKE THE EMPIRE'S DARTH --
BA-DOOP-A WHREEEE!
ARTOO-DETOO! WHERE HAVE YOU--
SWIFTLY, THE LITTLE DROID TELLS THREEPIO AND DROID WORLD'S FOUNDER THAT AND MORE!
ARTOO! THIS SOUNDS LIKE--
REVOLUTION! LEAVE HANDLING IT TO ME. BUT I HEAR NOISES IN THE MAIN CORRIDOR--
--BETTER TAKE THIS EMERGENCY EXIT.
NO ONE WILL ESCAPE, KLIGSON! YOUR DAY IS OVER... MINE IS BEGINNING!
THAT LASER-CANNON HARNESS IS UNAUTHORIZED, ZEE-EXTHREE! REMOVE IT BEFORE--
BEFORE SOMEONE GETS HURT?
BOOM

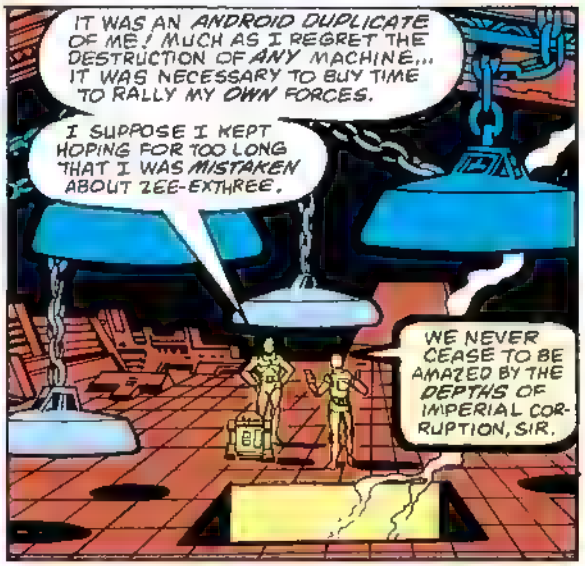

ZEE-EXTHREE! THIS EMERGENCY DOOR IS BLAST-SHIELDED!
FTUM BVOW
THE WEAPONRY YOU CREATED FOR US IS NOT POWERFUL ENOUGH TO BRING IT DOWN!
THE IMPORTANT FOE HAS FALLEN! WITHOUT HIS MECHANICAL BODY WHICH MOCKED OUR OWN--
--KLIGSON IS NO MORE!
NOW WE VANQUISH ANY WHO STILL HOLD TO HIS WAYS... WHO WILL NOT SERVE THE IMPERIAL CAUSE!
AS THE EMPIRE RULES THE GALAXY--
--DROID WORLD IS OURS TO COMMAND!


DID YOU HEAR, ARTOO? THAT MAD ZEE-EXTHREE HAS SLAIN HIS OWN MASTER!
WE'VE GOT TO FIND OUR WAY OFF THIS AWFUL PLACE BEFORE--
FRIIIIIP A-DOOT!
T-THE WARBOT YOU TOLD US ABOUT... IN COMPLETE WORKING CONDITION!
WE'RE DOOMED, ARTOO!
FIRE-EXTINGUISHING SPRAY? ARTOO, WHAT POSSIBLE GOOD CAN IT DO AGAINST THAT MECHANIZED MONSTER?!
TA-WOOT VADEEP BIIIIIIIT!
WA-LOOM!
I NEVER KNEW THAT, ARTOO!
THE CLOUD THROWS OFF THE ACCURACY OF ITS TARGETING SENSORS?!
MREEEEP!
YES. RUNNING IS AN EXCELLENT IDEA! AND THIS WAY HAS TO BE SAFER THAN--
THIS REALLY ISN'T FAIR... NOT FAIR AT ALL!
THE REBEL DROIDS! RUN THEM DOWN... BLAST THEM! DESTROY THEM!

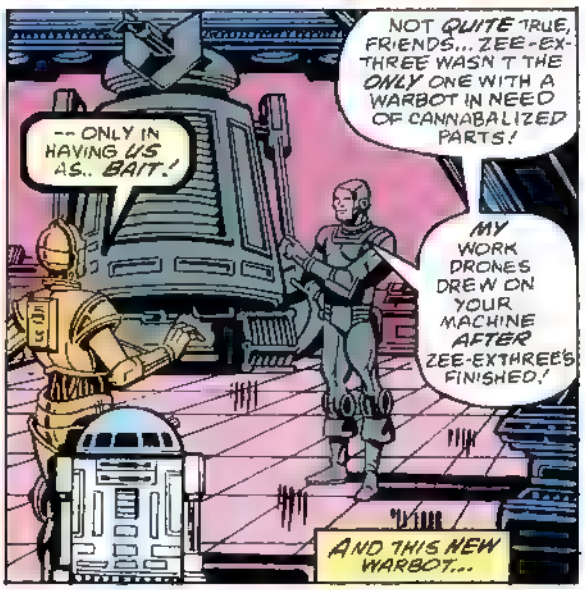

BUT FAIR OR NOT, IT DRIVES THREEPIO AND ARTOO TO THE POINT AT WHICH WE LEFT THEM.
MORE SPEED! DRIVE THEM OVER THE EDGE... INTO THE MELTING CORE!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT, ARTOO! HOW CAN THEY BE SO ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT DESTROYING FELLOW DROIDS?
TA-DOOT DITTA-BLIK!
ONLY ONE WAY OUT? WHAT DO YOU MEAN ONE WA--
ARTOO... DON'T GIVE IN TO THE BRUTES BY COMMITTING SUICIDE!
I'LL CATCH YOU! I'LL--
YAAAAHH!
THE CORE'S INCREDIBLE HEAT REACHES UP FOR THE TWO PLUNGING ROBOTS LIKE A LIVING THING! BUT AS THEY CLUMSILY TOPPLE...
..THEY SUDDENLY FALL UP!
MAGNETIC GRAPPLES!

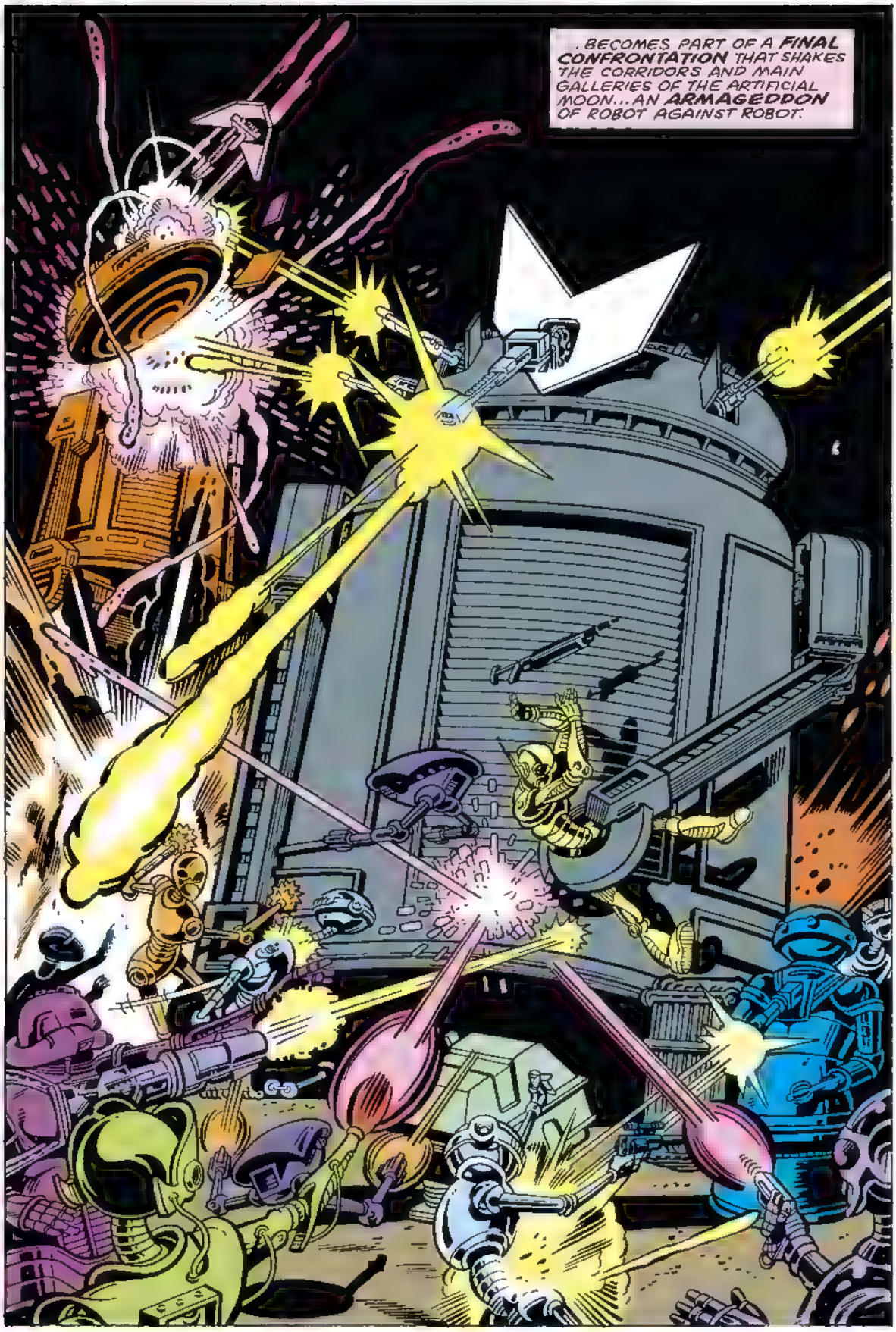
AND THEY DRAW THE PAIR HIGHER... HIGHER... EVEN AS THE ON-RUSHING WAR MACHINE, UNABLE TO HALT ITS SPEEDED UP DRIVE FORWARD...
. MEETS THE FATE INTENDED FOR THEM!
YOUR SENSORS DETECTED THESE BEING ACTIVATED DIDN'T THEY, ARTOO? B-BUT... BY WHOM?

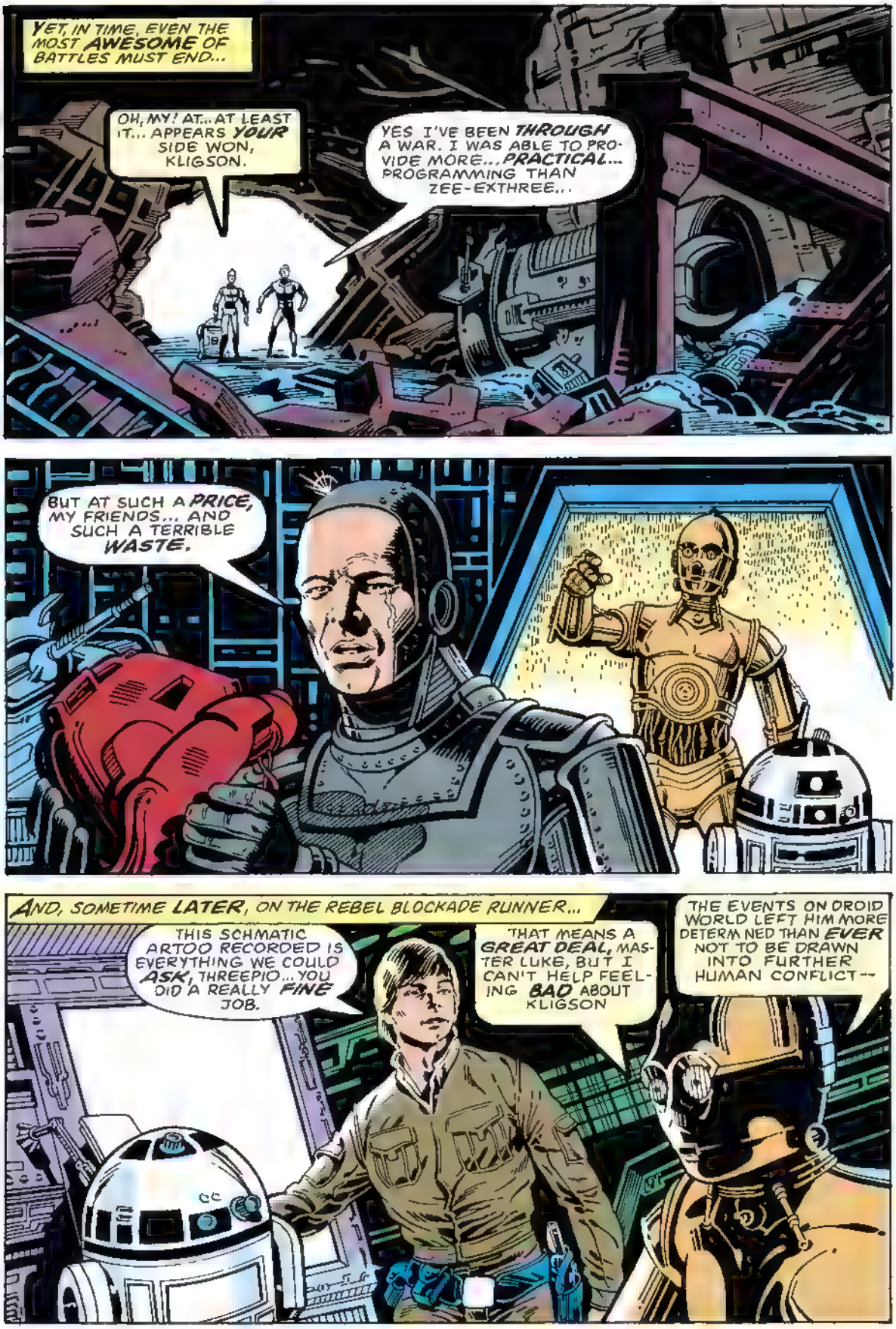

THE ANSWER AWAITS THEM AT THE ROOF OF THE CORE...
K-KLIGSON...! IT CAN'T BE! ARTOO AND I SAW YOU--

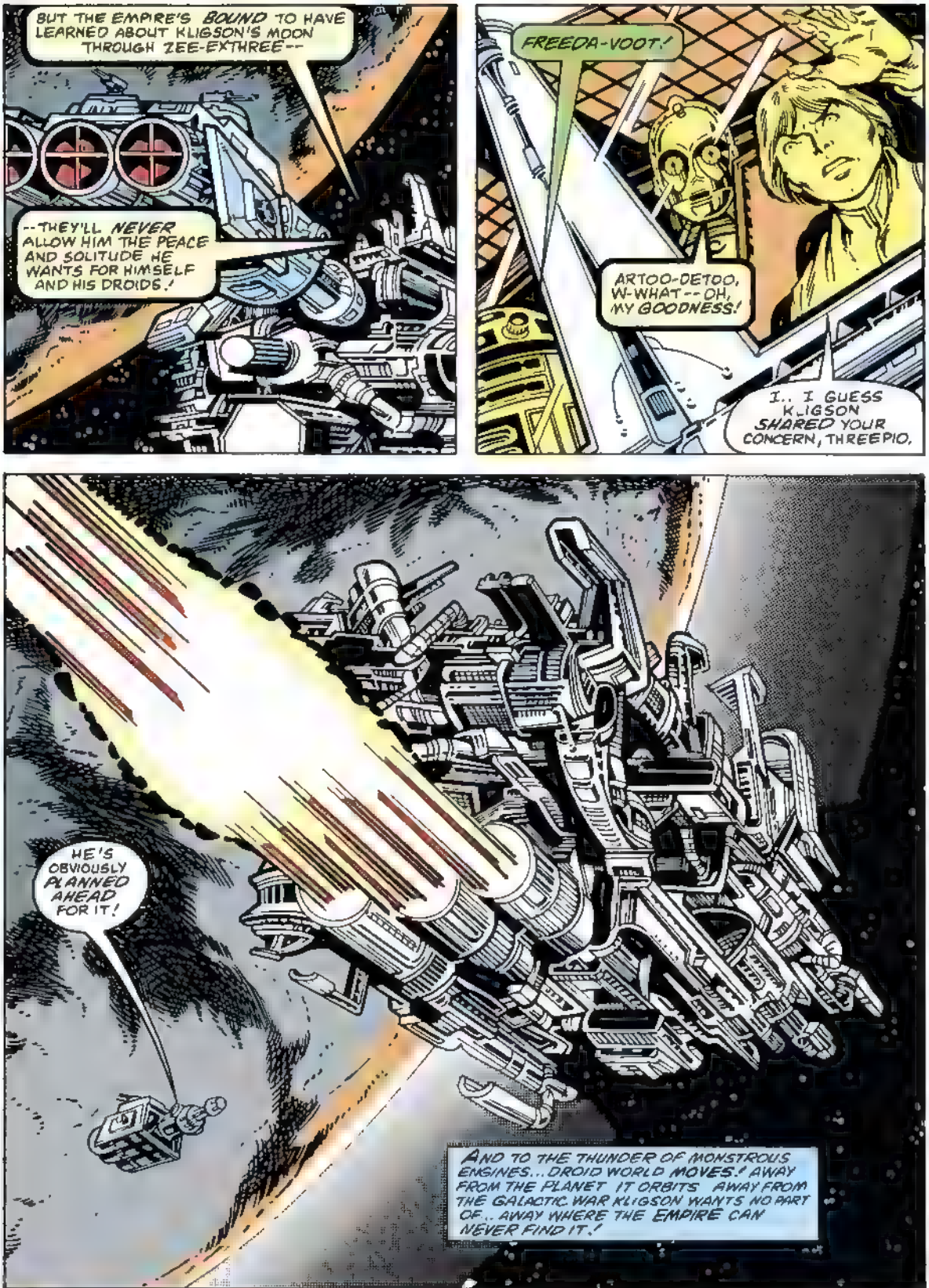

IT WAS AN ANDROID DUPLICATE OF ME! MUCH AS I REGRET THE DESTRUCTION OF ANY MACHINE... IT WAS NECESSARY TO BUY TIME TO RALLY MY OWN FORCES.
I SUPPOSE I KEPT HOPING FOR TOO LONG THAT I WAS MISTAKEN ABOUT ZEE-EXTHREE.
WE NEVER CEASE TO BE AMAZED BY THE DEPTHS OF IMPERIAL CORRUPTION, SIR.

IN THIS CASE, YOU'RE RIGHT, THREEPIO. IT WAS DEEPLY INGRAINED... AND SUBTLY HIDDEN BY THE TIME MY FOOLISH HUMAN PR DE ADMITTED THE POSSIB LITY... SOMETHING DRAMATIC WAS NEEDED TO DRAW ZEE- EXTHREE OUT
BRINGING TWO REBEL DROIDS HERE SEEMED LIKELY TO MAKE HIM ACT.
THEN... YOU WERE NEVER INTERESTED IN REPAIRING OUR WARBOT--


-- ONLY IN HAVING US AS.. BAIT.!
NOT QUITE TRUE, FRIENDS... ZEE-EXTHREE WASN T THE ONLY ONE WITH A WARBOT IN NEED OF CANNABALIZED PARTS!
MY WORK DRONES DREW ON YOUR MACHINE AFTER ZEE-EXTHREE'S FINISHED.
AND THIS NEW WARBOT...


...BECOMES PART OF A FINAL CONFRONTATION THAT SHAKES THE CORRIDORS AND MAIN GALLERIES OF THE ARTIFICIAL MOON... AN ARMAGEDDON OF ROBOT AGAINST ROBOT.


YET, IN TIME, EVEN THE MOST AWESOME OF BATTLES MUST END...
OH, MY! AT... AT LEAST IT... APPEARS YOUR SIDE WON, KLIGSON.
YES I'VE BEEN THROUGH A WAR. I WAS ABLE TO PROVIDE MORE... PRACTICAL... PROGRAMMING THAN ZEE-EXTHREE...
BUT AT SUCH A PRICE, MY FRIENDS... AND SUCH A TERRIBLE WASTE.
AND, SOMETIME LATER, ON THE REBEL BLOCKADE RUNNER...
THIS SCHMATIC ARTOO RECORDED IS EVERYTHING WE COULD ASK, THREEPIO... YOU DID A REALLY FINE JOB.
THAT MEANS A GREAT DEAL, MASTER LUKE, BUT I CAN'T HELP FEELING BAD ABOUT KLIGSON
THE EVENTS ON DROID WORLD LEFT HIM MORE DETERMINED THAN EVER NOT TO BE DRAWN INTO FURTHER HUMAN CONFLICT--


BUT THE EMPIRE'S BOUND TO HAVE LEARNED ABOUT KLIGSON'S MOON THROUGH ZEE-EXTHREE--
--THEY'LL NEVER ALLOW HIM THE PEACE AND SOLITUDE HE WANTS FOR HIMSELF AND HIS DROIDS.!
FREEDA-VOOT.!
ARTOO-DETOO, W-WHAT--OH, MY GOODNESS!
I.. I GUESS KLIGSON SHARED YOUR CONCERN, THREEPIO.
HE'S OBVIOUSLY PLANNED AHEAD FOR IT!
AND TO THE THUNDER OF MONSTROUS ENGINES... DROID WORLD MOVES.! AWAY FROM THE PLANET IT ORBITS AWAY FROM THE GALACTIC WAR KLIGSON WANTS NO PART OF.. AWAY WHERE THE EMPIRE CAN NEVER FIND IT.!

NEXT PRINCESS LEIA PLAYS A GAME OF DIPLOMATIC DERRING-DO AGAINST DARTH VADER...

THE THIRD LAW!

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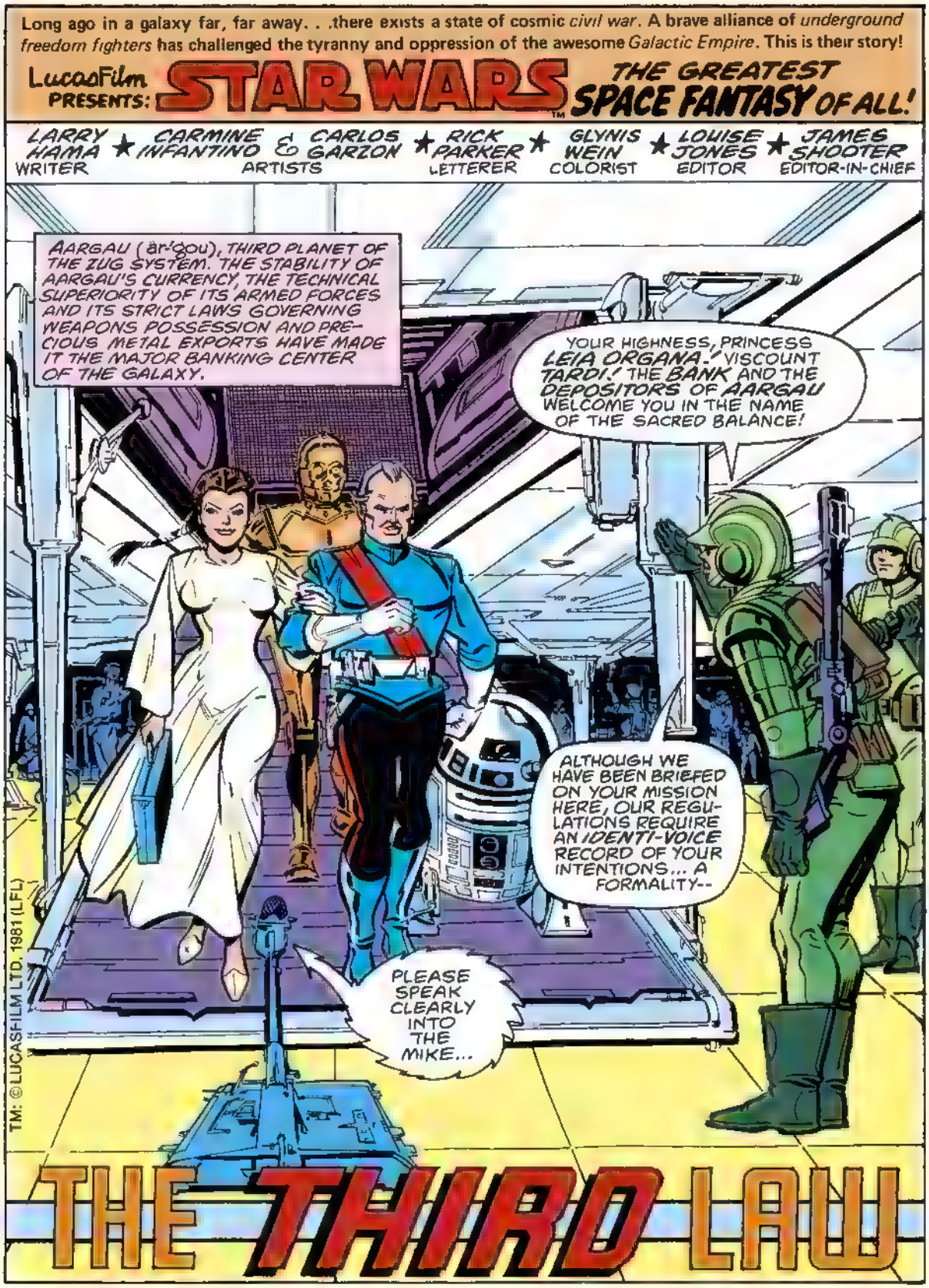
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
STAR WARS
LEIA VS. VADER!
THE THIRD LAW!


Long ago in a galaxy far, far away. . .there exists a state of cosmic *civil war*. A brave alliance of *underground freedom fighters* has challenged the tyranny and oppression of the awesome *Galactic Empire*. This is their story!
LucasFilm PRESENTS: STAR WARS™ THE GREATEST SPACE FANTASY OF ALL!
LARRY HAMA WRITER ★ CARMINE INFANTINO & CARLOS GARZON ARTISTS ★ RICK PARKER LETTERER ★ GLYNIS WEIN COLORIST ★ LOUISE JONES EDITOR ★ JAMES SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
AARGAU (är'gou), THIRD PLANET OF THE ZUG SYSTEM. THE STABILITY OF AARGAU'S CURRENCY, THE TECHNICAL SUPERIORITY OF ITS ARMED FORCES AND ITS STRICT LAWS GOVERNING WEAPONS POSSESSION AND PRECIOUS METAL EXPORTS HAVE MADE IT THE MAJOR BANKING CENTER OF THE GALAXY.
YOUR HIGHNESS, PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA.' VISCOUNT TARDI.' THE BANK AND THE DEPOSITORS OF AARGAU WELCOME YOU IN THE NAME OF THE SACRED BALANCE!
ALTHOUGH WE HAVE BEEN BRIEFED ON YOUR MISSION HERE, OUR REGULATIONS REQUIRE AN IDENTI-VOICE RECORD OF YOUR INTENTIONS... A FORMALITY--
PLEASE SPEAK CLEARLY INTO THE MIKE...
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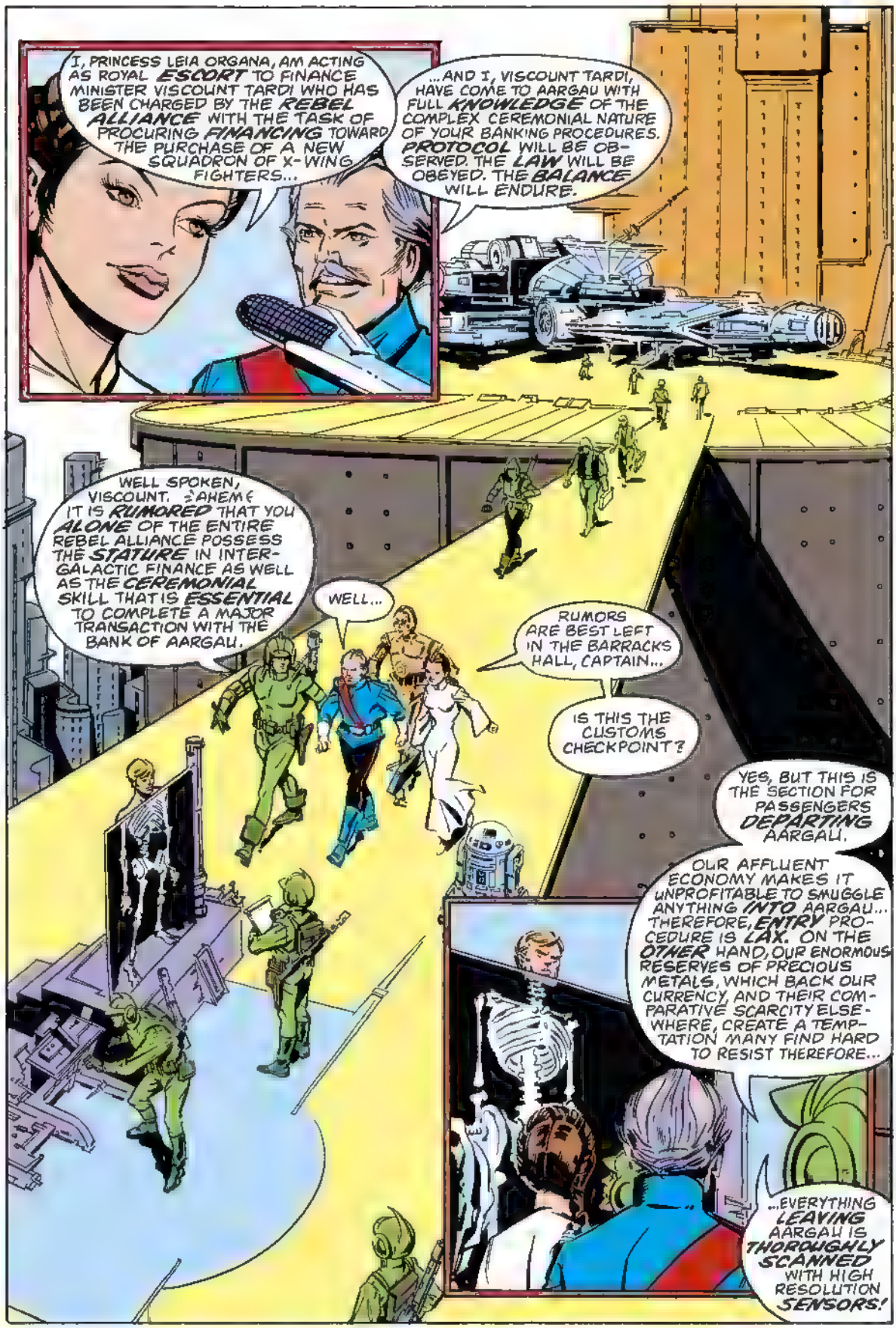
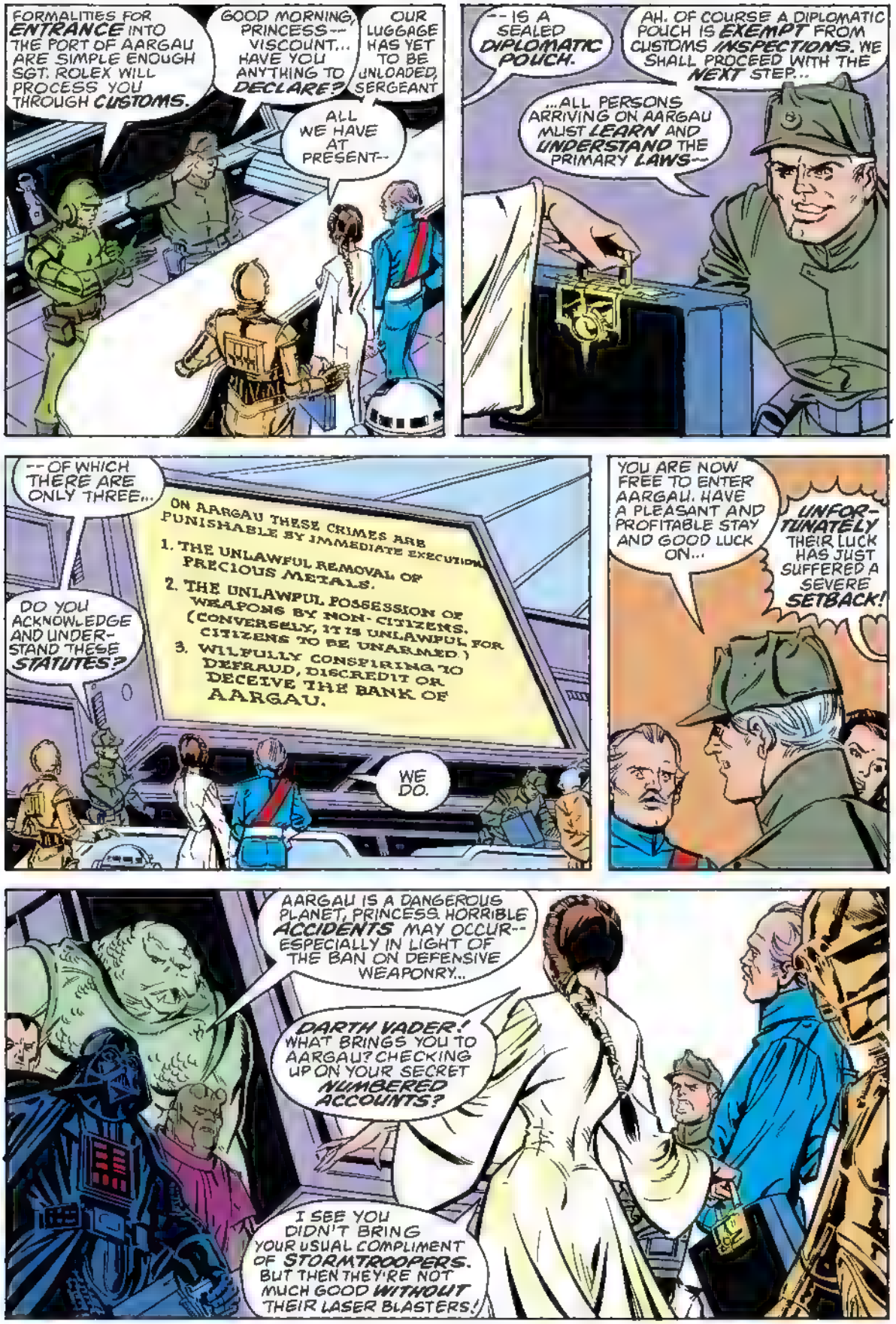
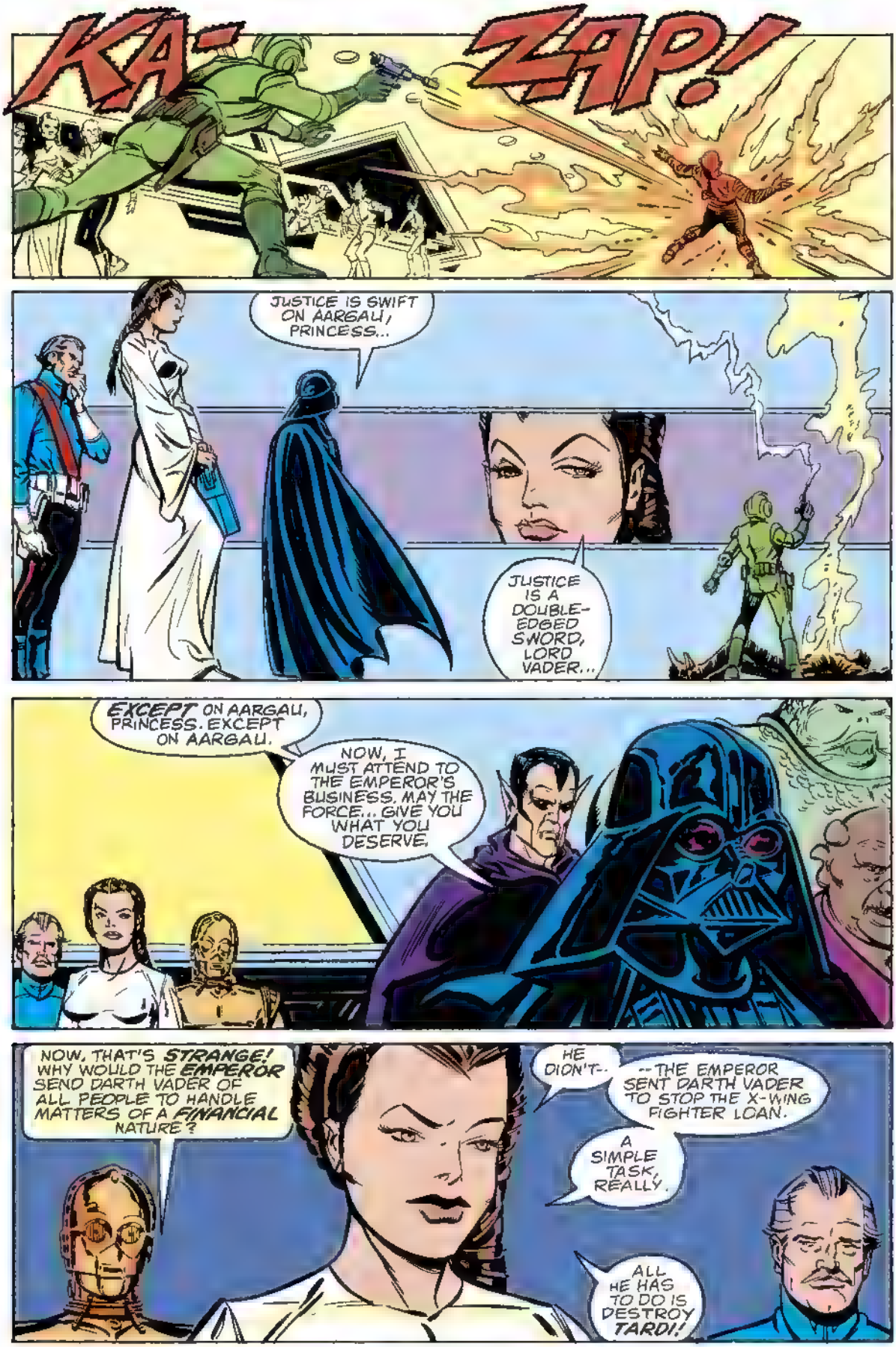
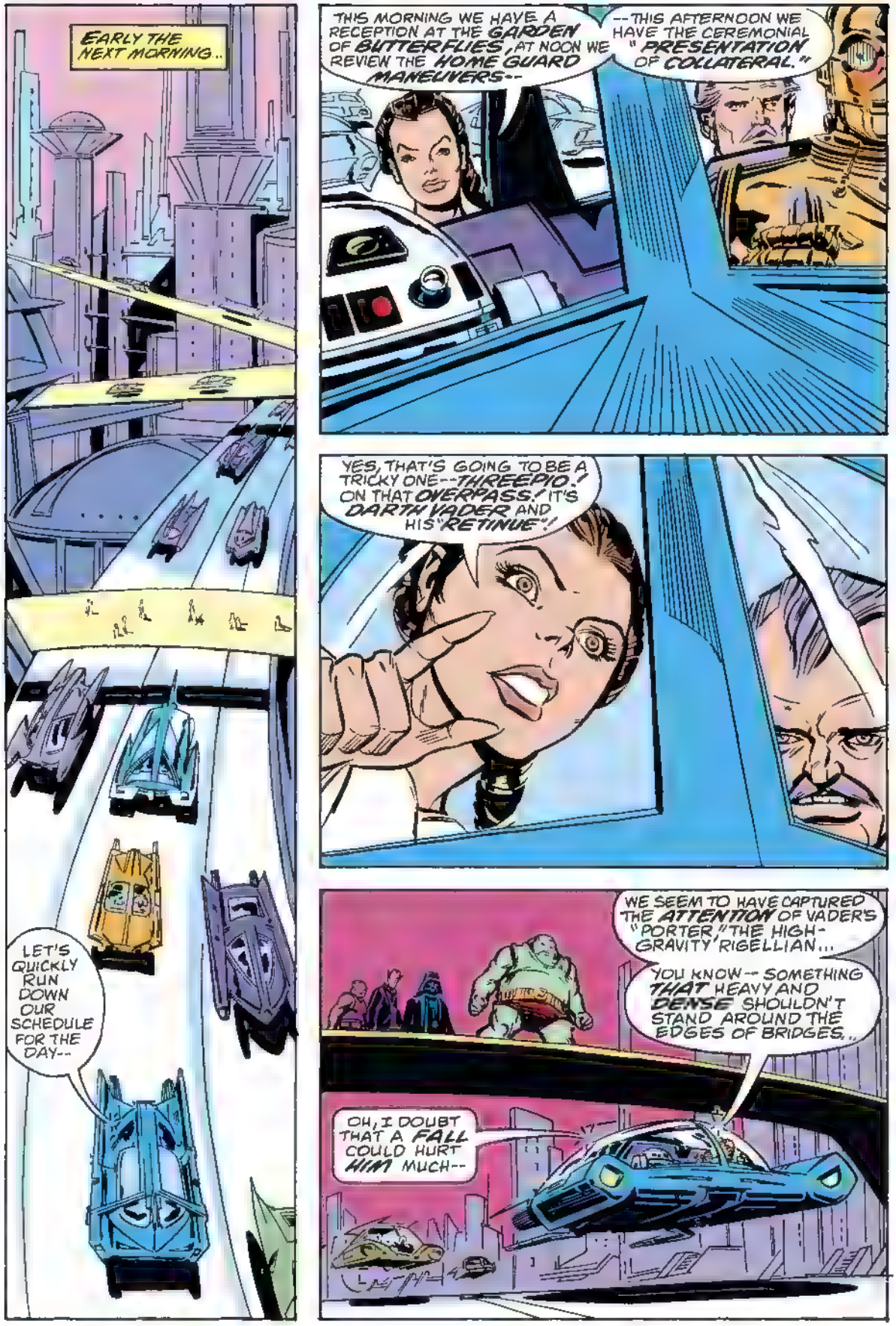
THE THIRD LAW

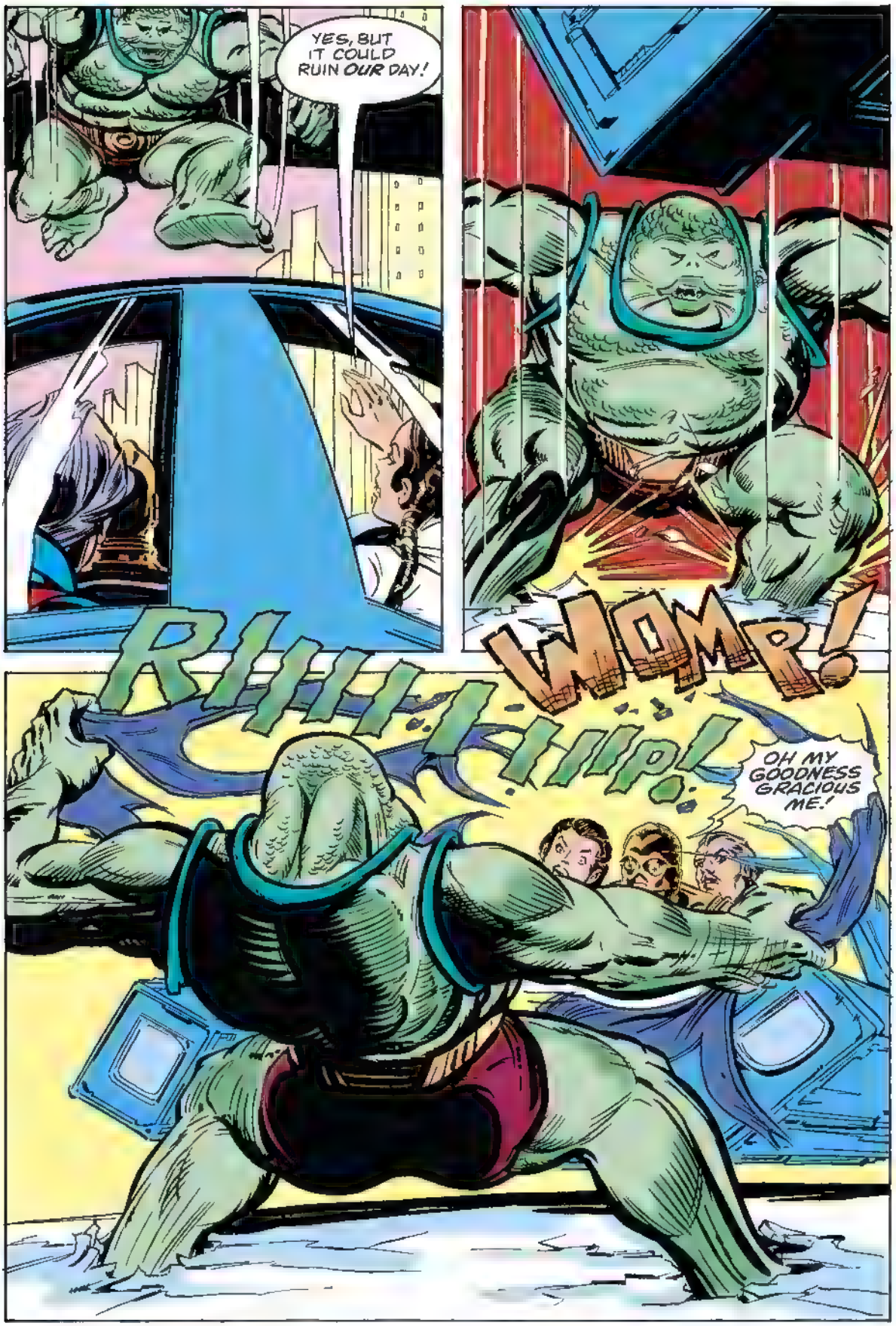

I, PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA, AM ACTING AS ROYAL ESCORT TO FINANCE MINISTER VISCOUNT TARDI WHO HAS BEEN CHARGED BY THE REBEL ALLIANCE WITH THE TASK OF PROCURING FINANCING TOWARD THE PURCHASE OF A NEW SQUADRON OF X-WING FIGHTERS...
...AND I, VISCOUNT TARDI, HAVE COME TO AARGAU WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMPLEX CEREMONIAL NATURE OF YOUR BANKING PROCEDURES. PROTOCOL WILL BE OBSERVED. THE LAW WILL BE OBEYED. THE BALANCE WILL ENDURE.
WELL SPOKEN, VISCOUNT. AHEM! IT IS RUMORED THAT YOU ALONE OF THE ENTIRE REBEL ALLIANCE POSSESS THE STATURE IN INTERGALACTIC FINANCE AS WELL AS THE CEREMONIAL SKILL THAT IS ESSENTIAL TO COMPLETE A MAJOR TRANSACTION WITH THE BANK OF AARGAU.
WELL...
RUMORS ARE BEST LEFT IN THE BARRACKS HALL, CAPTAIN...
IS THIS THE CUSTOMS CHECKPOINT?
YES, BUT THIS IS THE SECTION FOR PASSENGERS DEPARTING AARGAU.
OUR AFFLUENT ECONOMY MAKES IT UNPROFITABLE TO SMUGGLE ANYTHING INTO AARGAU... THEREFORE, ENTRY PROCEDURE IS LAX. ON THE OTHER HAND, OUR ENORMOUS RESERVES OF PRECIOUS METALS, WHICH BACK OUR CURRENCY, AND THEIR COMPARATIVE SCARCITY ELSEWHERE, CREATE A TEMPTATION MANY FIND HARD TO RESIST THEREFORE...
...EVERYTHING LEAVING AARGAU IS THOROUGHLY SCANNED WITH HIGH RESOLUTION SENSORS!


FORMALITIES FOR ENTRANCE INTO THE PORT OF AARGAU ARE SIMPLE ENOUGH SGT. ROLEX WILL PROCESS YOU THROUGH CUSTOMS.
GOOD MORNING, PRINCESS-- VISCOUNT... HAVE YOU ANYTHING TO DECLARE?
OUR LUGGAGE HAS YET TO BE UNLOADED, SERGEANT
ALL WE HAVE AT PRESENT--
--IS A SEALED DIPLOMATIC POUCH.
AH. OF COURSE A DIPLOMATIC POUCH IS EXEMPT FROM CUSTOMS INSPECTIONS. WE SHALL PROCEED WITH THE NEXT STEP...
...ALL PERSONS ARRIVING ON AARGAU MUST LEARN AND UNDERSTAND THE PRIMARY LAWS--
--OF WHICH THERE ARE ONLY THREE...
ON AARGAU THESE CRIMES ARE PUNISHABLE BY IMMEDIATE EXECUTION:
1. THE UNLAWFUL REMOVAL OF PRECIOUS METALS.
2. THE UNLAWFUL POSSESSION OF WEAPONS BY NON-CITIZENS. (CONVERSELY, IT IS UNLAWFUL FOR CITIZENS TO BE UNARMED.)
3. WILFULLY CONSPIRING TO DEFRAUD, DISCREDIT OR DECEIVE THE BANK OF AARGAU.
DO YOU ACKNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTAND THESE STATUTES?
WE DO.
YOU ARE NOW FREE TO ENTER AARGAU. HAVE A PLEASANT AND PROFITABLE STAY AND GOOD LUCK ON...
UNFORTUNATELY THEIR LUCK HAS JUST SUFFERED A SEVERE SETBACK!
AARGAU IS A DANGEROUS PLANET, PRINCESS. HORRIBLE ACCIDENTS MAY OCCUR-- ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF THE BAN ON DEFENSIVE WEAPONRY...
DARTH VADER! WHAT BRINGS YOU TO AARGAU? CHECKING UP ON YOUR SECRET NUMBERED ACCOUNTS?
I SEE YOU DIDN'T BRING YOUR USUAL COMPLIMENT OF STORMTROOPERS. BUT THEN THEY'RE NOT MUCH GOOD WITHOUT THEIR LASER BLASTERS!

I WILL IGNORE YOUR PITIFUL ATTEMPTS AT HUMOR, PRINCESS...
I COME TO AARGAU ON A DIPLOMATIC MISSION FOR THE EMPIRE. MY RETINUE IS SMALL, BUT MY NEEDS ARE SPARTAN. MAY I INTRODUCE--
--MY PORTER...
...MY SECRETARY...
...AND MY VALET...
NOW, IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME, I WISH TO CONTINUE THROUGH CUSTOMS...
I HAVE NOTHING TO DECLARE BUT THIS DIPLOMATIC POUCH.
NOTHING IN THERE BUT PAPERWORK AND A CHANGE OF ARMOR, RIGHT?
DON'T TELL ME, IT'S A SECRET.
AND THIS RETINUE OF YOURS DOESN'T FOOL ME FOR A MICRO-SECOND!
YOUR VALET IS A TELEKINETIC...
...YOUR SECRETARY IS A SHAPE-SHIFTER...
...AND YOUR PORTER IS A HIGH-GRAVITY CREATURE FROM RIGEL VII.
EACH IS A KNOWN MEMBER OF THE ASSASSIN'S GUILD AND I'LL WAGER THAT THEIR SPECIALTY IS UNARMED KILLING!
FURTHERMORE...
SMUGGLER ALERT! CITIZENS STAND BY YOUR WEAPONS!
THIS MAN IS A SMUGGLER!
HE HAS GOLD IMPLANTS ON HIS FIFTH AND SIXTH RIBS!
NO! I CAN EXPLAIN!


KA-
ZAP!
JUSTICE IS SWIFT ON AARGAU, PRINCESS..
JUSTICE IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD, LORD VADER...
EXCEPT ON AARGAU, PRINCESS. EXCEPT ON AARGAU.
NOW, I MUST ATTEND TO THE EMPEROR'S BUSINESS. MAY THE FORCE... GIVE YOU WHAT YOU DESERVE.
NOW, THAT'S STRANGE! WHY WOULD THE EMPEROR SEND DARTH VADER OF ALL PEOPLE TO HANDLE MATTERS OF A FINANCIAL NATURE?
HE DIDN'T..
--THE EMPEROR SENT DARTH VADER TO STOP THE X-WING FIGHTER LOAN.
A SIMPLE TASK, REALLY.
ALL HE HAS TO DO IS DESTROY TARDI!

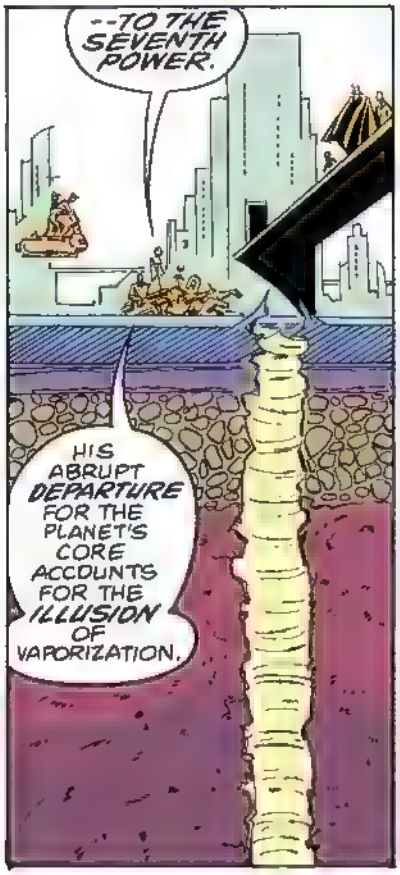

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING..
LET'S QUICKLY RUN DOWN OUR SCHEDULE FOR THE DAY--
THIS MORNING WE HAVE A RECEPTION AT THE GARDEN OF BUTTERFLIES, AT NOON WE REVIEW THE HOME GUARD MANEUVERS--
--THIS AFTERNOON WE HAVE THE CEREMONIAL "PRESENTATION OF COLLATERAL."
YES, THAT'S GOING TO BE A TRICKY ONE--THREEPIO! ON THAT OVERPASS! IT'S DARTH VADER AND HIS "RETINUE"!
WE SEEM TO HAVE CAPTURED THE ATTENTION OF VADER'S "PORTER," THE HIGH-GRAVITY RIGELLIAN...
YOU KNOW-- SOMETHING THAT HEAVY AND DENSE SHOULDN'T STAND AROUND THE EDGES OF BRIDGES..
OH, I DOUBT THAT A FALL COULD HURT HIM MUCH--

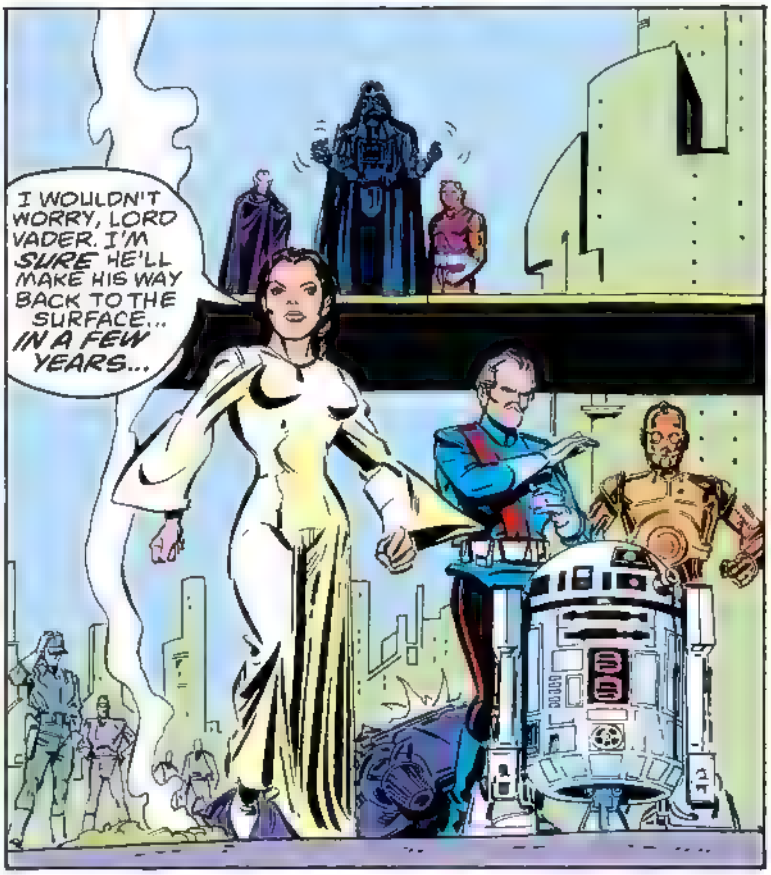

YES, BUT IT COULD RUIN OUR DAY!
WOMP!
RIIIIIIIP!
OH MY GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME!

THREEPIO! THE DIPLOMATIC POUCH!
THIS IS INTOLERABLE! WE MUST REGISTER A COMPLAINT THROUGH PROPER CHANNELS--!
NOW WHERE IS THAT THING?
I SAY!
HERE IT IS!
VAP!
THIS SHOULD PUT HIM IN HIS PLACE!

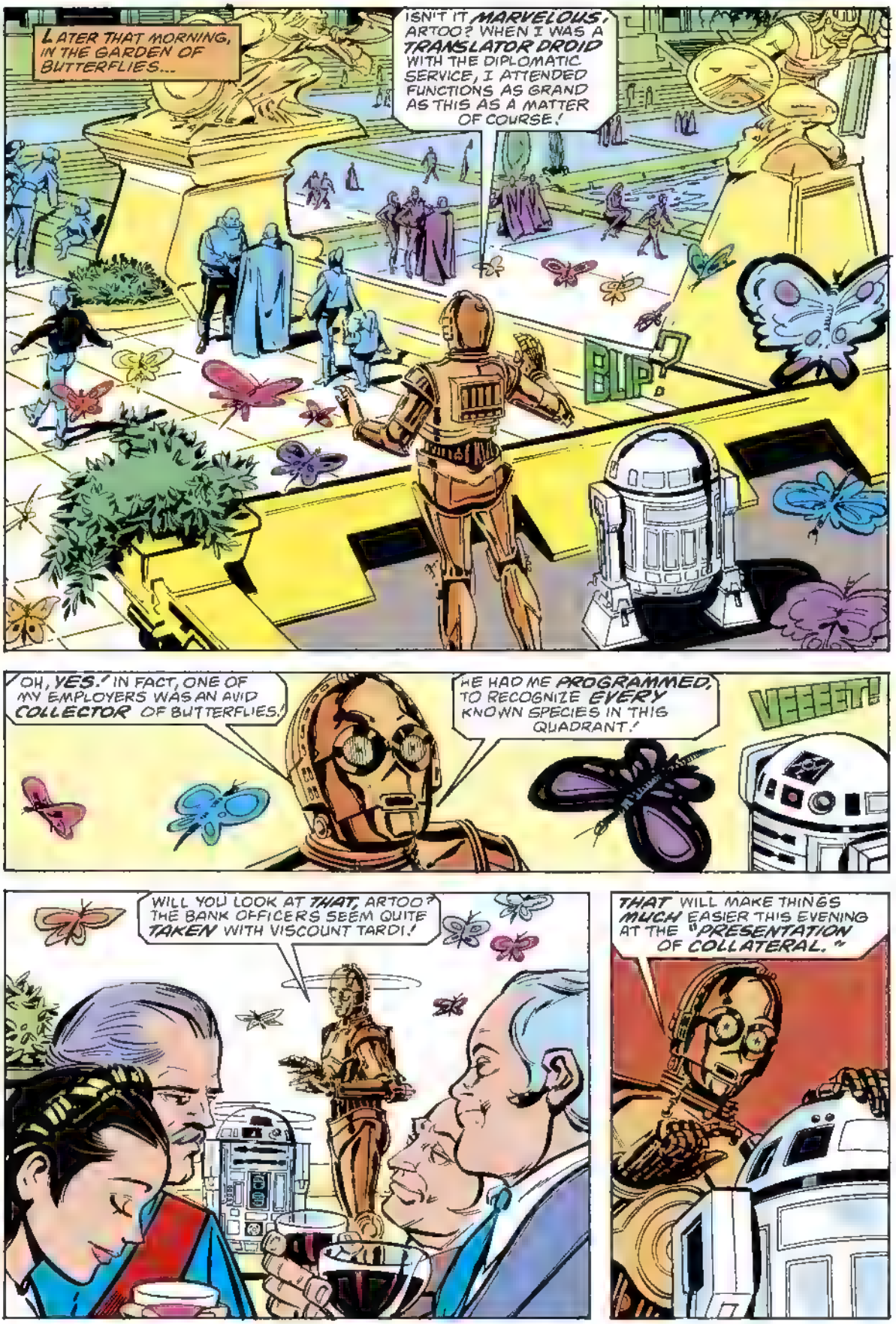
OFFICERS! I DEMAND THAT YOU TAKE ACTION AGAINST THESE LAWBREAKERS IMMEDIATELY! THIS CRIMINAL HAS VAPORIZED MY PORTER WITH A PROSCRIBED ENERGY WEAPON!
I SAW IT! THE POOR FELLOW FELL, AND SHE MURDERED HIM!
IS THIS TRUE? ARE YOU IN POSSESSION OF AN ILLEGAL WEAPON?
NO, OFFICERS. I WOULDN'T THINK OF BREAKING YOUR PRECIOUS LAW.

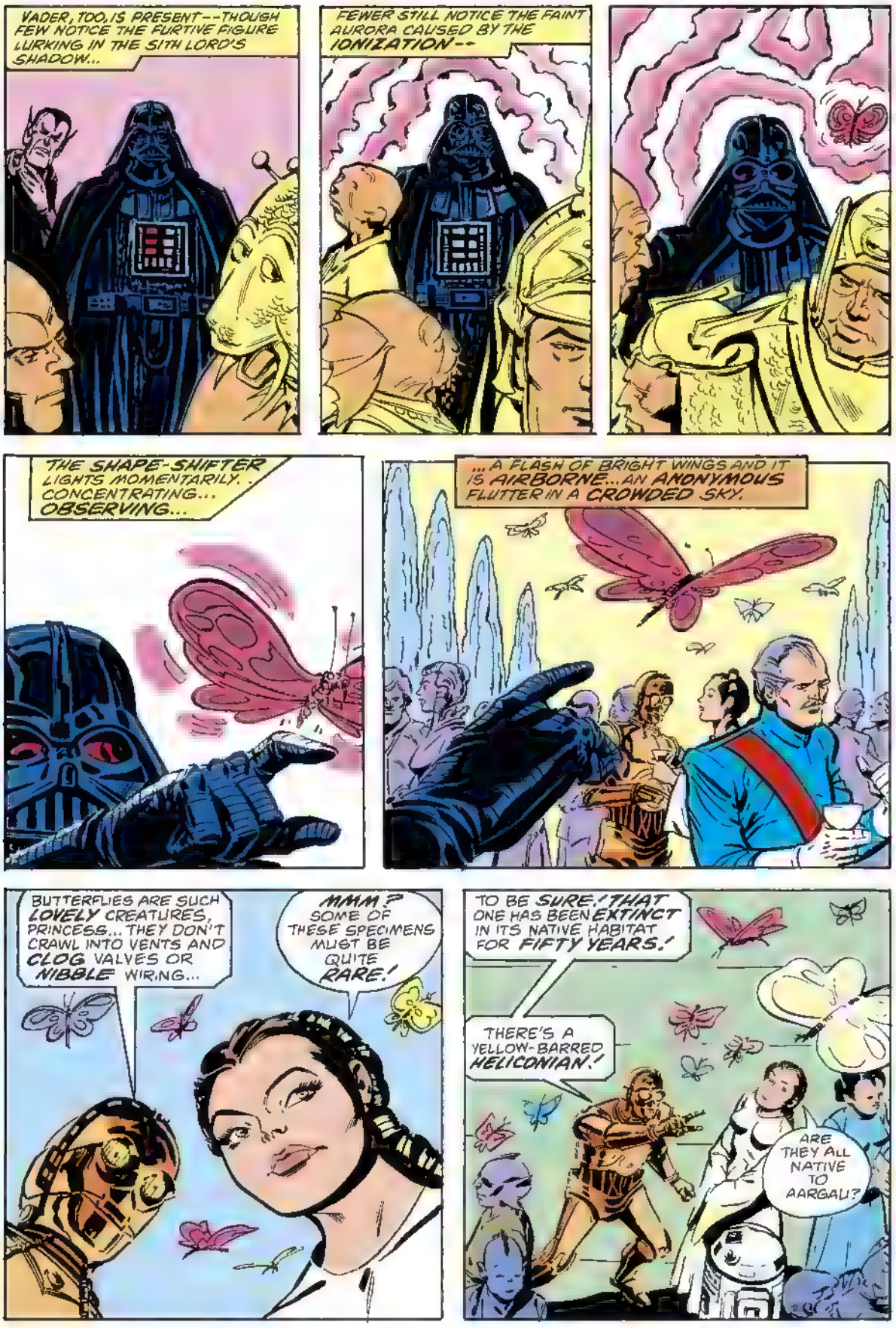
THIS IS A STANDARD MODEL GRAVITATIONAL FIELD DISRUPTOR, AVAILABLE IN ANY SPACE-PORT DUTY-FREE SHOP. YOUR PORTER WASN'T VAPORIZED. I MERELY INCREASED HIS RELATIVE DENSITY--


--TO THE SEVENTH POWER.
HIS ABRUPT DEPARTURE FOR THE PLANET'S CORE ACCOUNTS FOR THE ILLUSION OF VAPORIZATION.

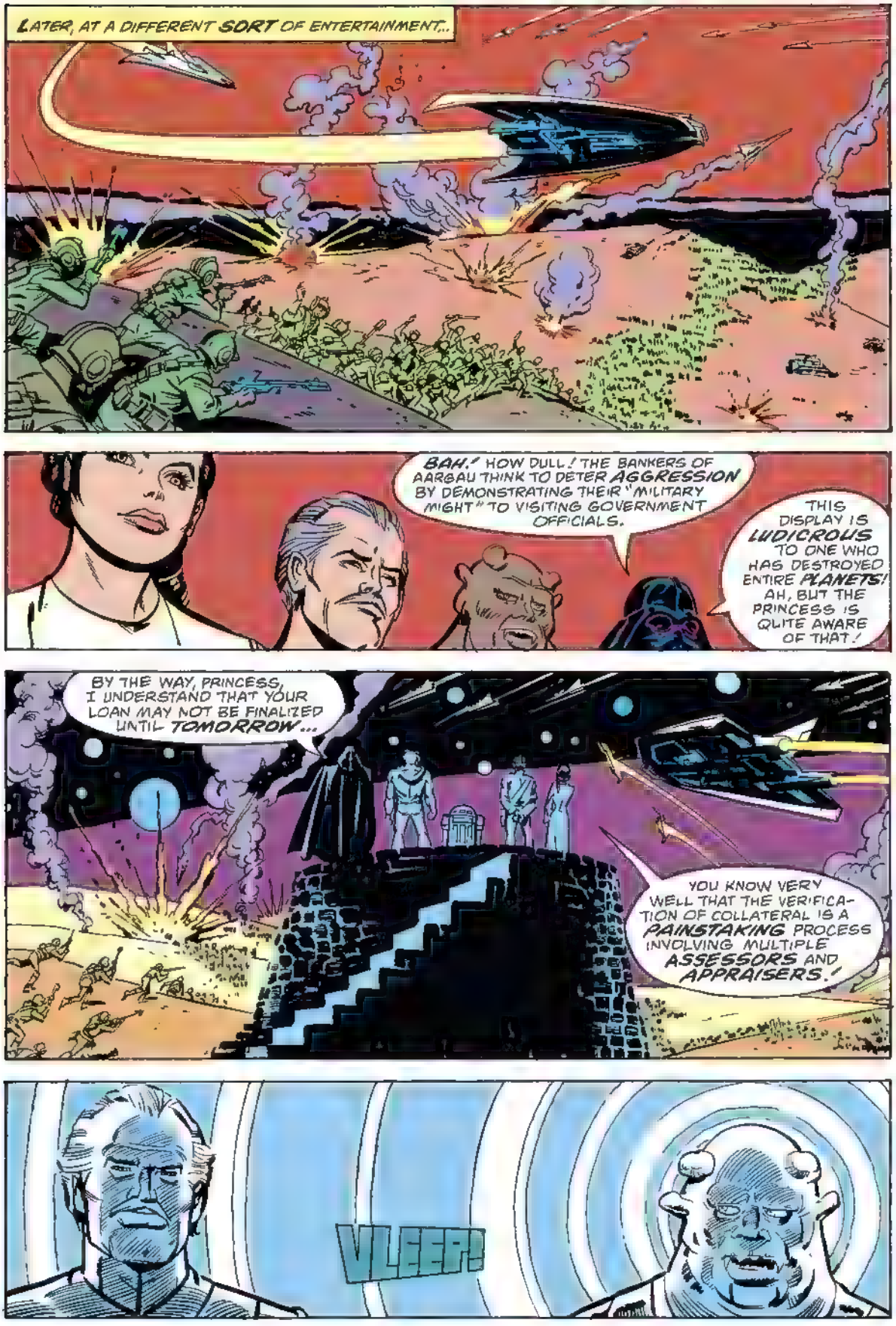

I WOULDN'T WORRY, LORD VADER. I'M SURE HE'LL MAKE HIS WAY BACK TO THE SURFACE... IN A FEW YEARS...

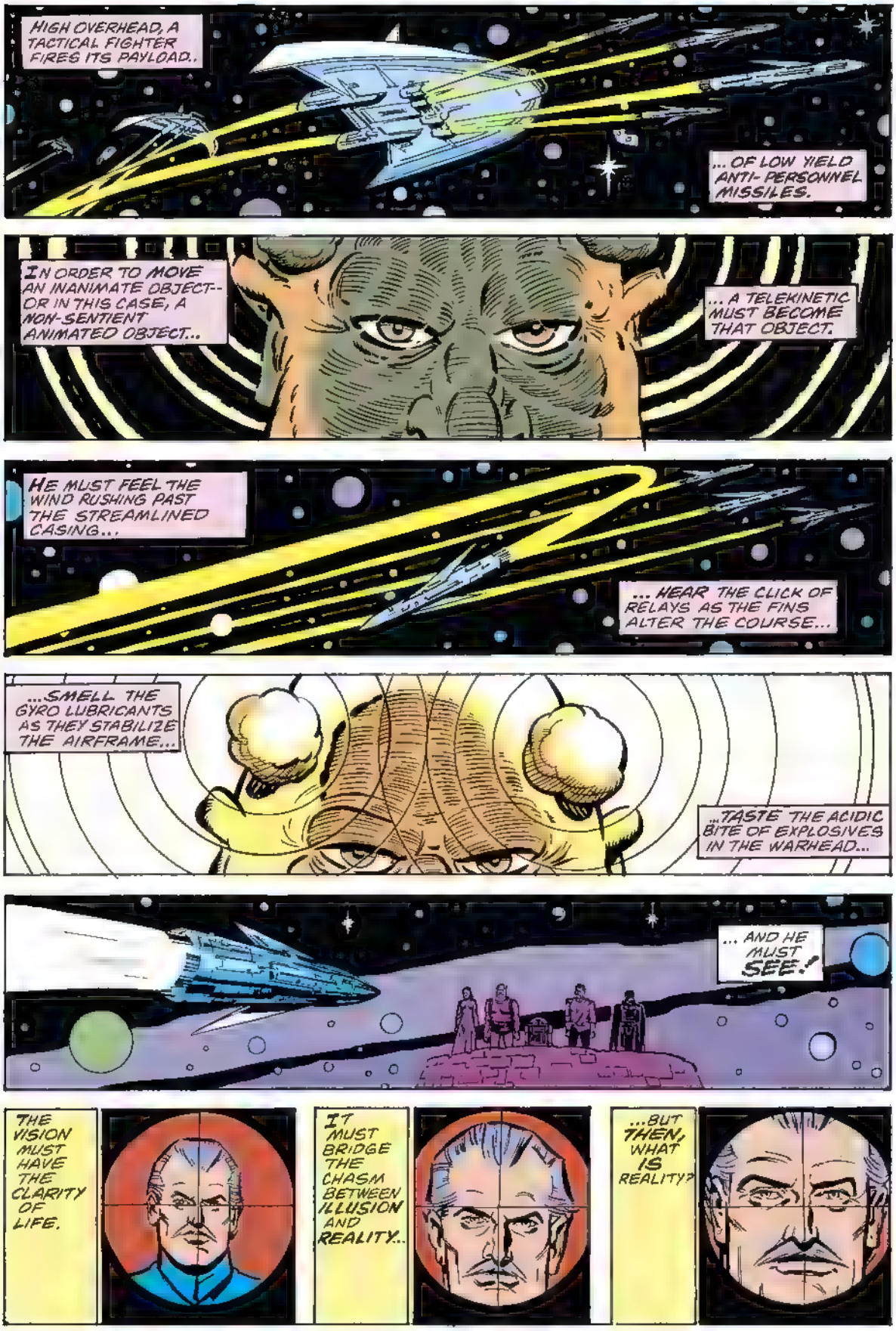
WAS IT WISE TO PRECIPITATE SUCH A BLATANT ATTACK SO EARLY IN THE GAME, LORD VADER?
BE SILENT, SHAPE-SHIFTER!
THE LORD VADER DOES NOT DISCUSS STRATEGY WITH HIS HIRELINGS!
HIRELINGS? WE BE BONDED AGENTS OF THE ASSASSIN'S GUILD!
WE DESERVE A MODICUM OF RESPECT AFTER ALL, WE ARE PROFESSIONALS!
YOU ARE PROFESSIONAL PAWNS!
AND PAWNS ARE SACRIFICED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE IMPORTANT PIECES!

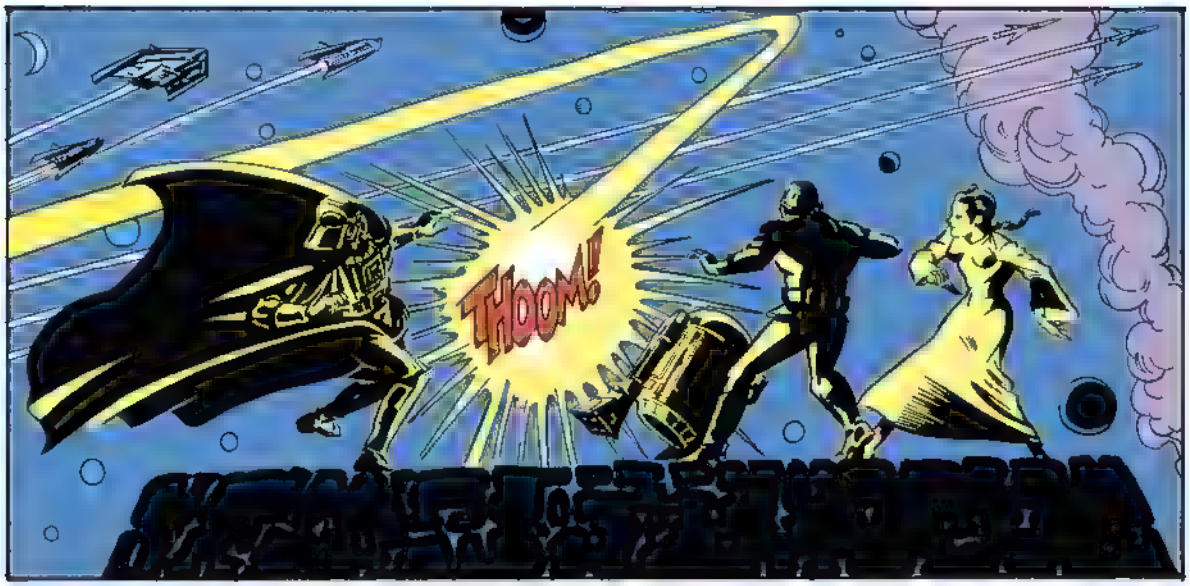

LATER THAT MORNING, IN THE GARDEN OF BUTTERFLIES...
ISN'T IT MARVELOUS, ARTOO? WHEN I WAS A TRANSLATOR DROID WITH THE DIPLOMATIC SERVICE, I ATTENDED FUNCTIONS AS GRAND AS THIS AS A MATTER OF COURSE!
BLIP?
OH, YES! IN FACT, ONE OF MY EMPLOYERS WAS AN AVID COLLECTOR OF BUTTERFLIES!
HE HAD ME PROGRAMMED, TO RECOGNIZE EVERY KNOWN SPECIES IN THIS QUADRANT!
VEEEET!
WILL YOU LOOK AT THAT, ARTOO? THE BANK OFFICERS SEEM QUITE TAKEN WITH VISCOUNT TARDI!
THAT WILL MAKE THINGS MUCH EASIER THIS EVENING AT THE "PRESENTATION OF COLLATERAL."

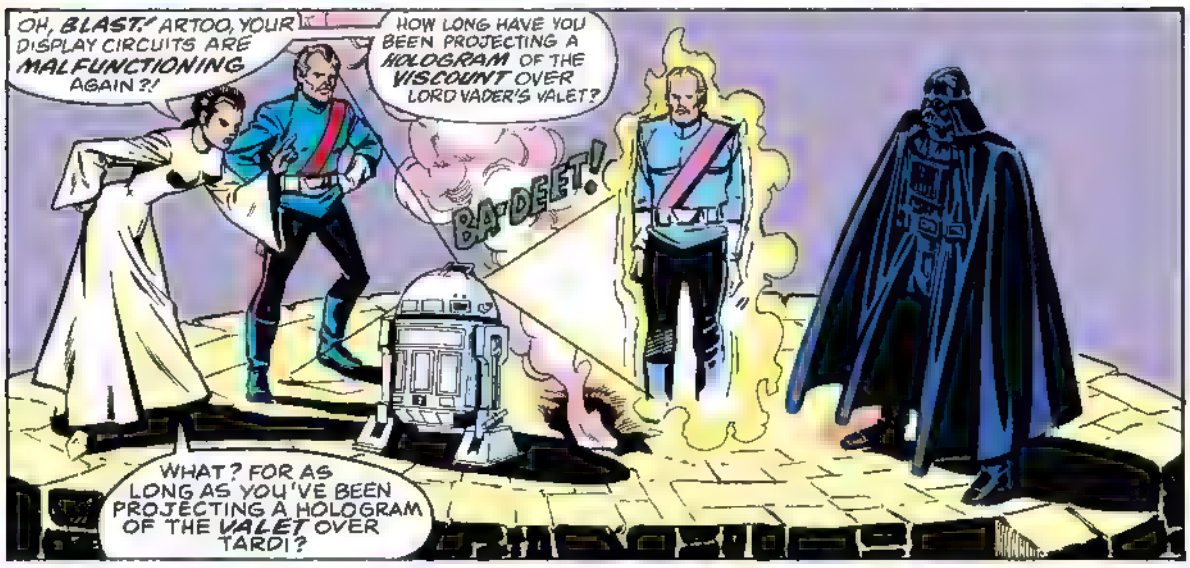

VADER, TOO, IS PRESENT--THOUGH FEW NOTICE THE FURTIVE FIGURE LURKING IN THE SITH LORD'S SHADOW...
FEWER STILL NOTICE THE FAINT AURORA CAUSED BY THE IONIZATION--
THE SHAPE-SHIFTER LIGHTS MOMENTARILY. . . CONCENTRATING... OBSERVING...
...A FLASH OF BRIGHT WINGS AND IT IS AIRBORNE...AN ANONYMOUS FLUTTER IN A CROWDED SKY.
BUTTERFLIES ARE SUCH LOVELY CREATURES, PRINCESS... THEY DON'T CRAWL INTO VENTS AND CLOG VALVES OR NIBBLE WIRING...
MMM? SOME OF THESE SPECIMENS MUST BE QUITE RARE!
TO BE SURE! THAT ONE HAS BEEN EXTINCT IN ITS NATIVE HABITAT FOR FIFTY YEARS!
THERE'S A YELLOW-BARRED HELICONIAN!
ARE THEY ALL NATIVE TO AARGAU?

NO. THE BRIGHT RED SPECIMEN BEHIND VISCOUNT TARDI IS FROM THE ANTARES SYSTEM--
-- ONE OF THE FEW SPECIES EQUIPPED WITH STINGERS AND THE ONLY ONE THAT SECRETES A DEADLY NERVE TOXIN--!
ARTOO! YOUR FIRE RETARDENT SPRAY!
THE VISCOUNT IS AWARE OF NO MORE THAN A SLIGHT DROP IN TEMPERATURE AT THE BACK OF HIS NECK...
OH, HOW DREADFULLY CLUMSY OF ME!
CRUNCH!
LORD VADER..
I'VE MADE SUCH A MESS? COULD YOU BE A DEAR AND--
LORD VADER?

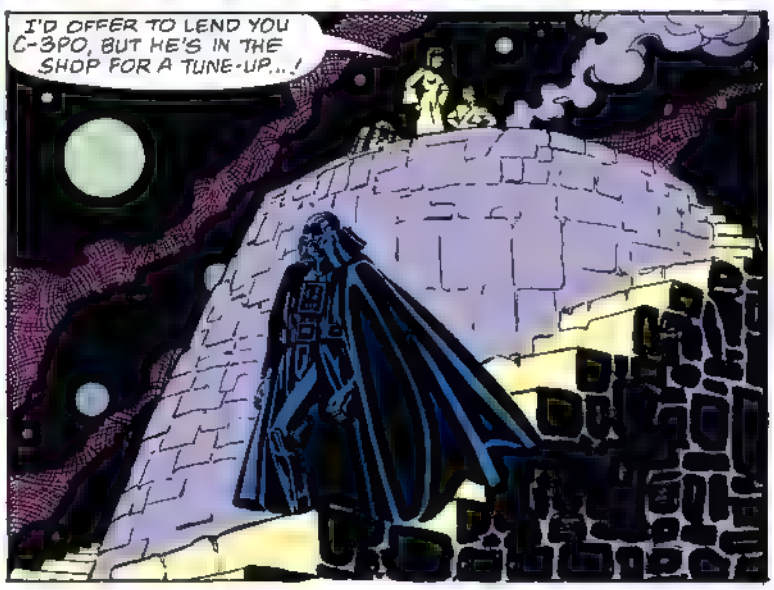

LATER, AT A DIFFERENT SORT OF ENTERTAINMENT...
BAH! HOW DULL! THE BANKERS OF AARGAU THINK TO DETER AGGRESSION BY DEMONSTRATING THEIR "MILITARY MIGHT" TO VISITING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.
THIS DISPLAY IS LUDICROUS TO ONE WHO HAS DESTROYED ENTIRE PLANETS! AH, BUT THE PRINCESS IS QUITE AWARE OF THAT!
BY THE WAY, PRINCESS, I UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR LOAN MAY NOT BE FINALIZED UNTIL TOMORROW...
YOU KNOW VERY WELL THAT THE VERIFICATION OF COLLATERAL IS A PAINSTAKING PROCESS INVOLVING MULTIPLE ASSESSORS AND APPRAISERS!
VLEEP!

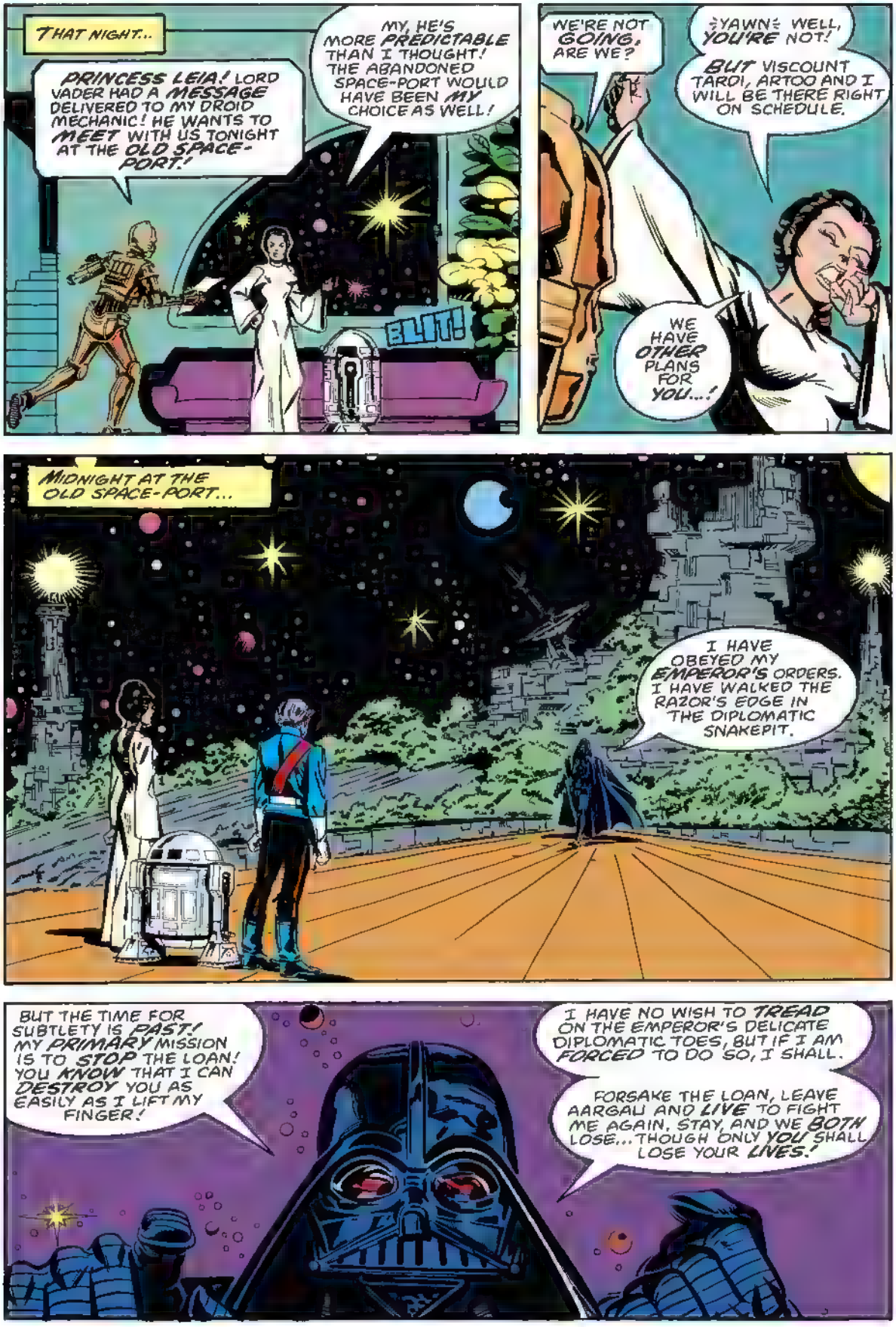

HIGH OVERHEAD, A TACTICAL FIGHTER FIRES ITS PAYLOAD..
... OF LOW YIELD ANTI-PERSONNEL MISSILES.
IN ORDER TO MOVE AN INANIMATE OBJECT-- OR IN THIS CASE, A NON-SENTIENT ANIMATED OBJECT...
... A TELEKINETIC MUST BECOME THAT OBJECT.
HE MUST FEEL THE WIND RUSHING PAST THE STREAMLINED CASING...
... HEAR THE CLICK OF RELAYS AS THE FINS ALTER THE COURSE...
...SMELL THE GYRO LUBRICANTS AS THEY STABILIZE THE AIRFRAME...
...TASTE THE ACIDIC BITE OF EXPLOSIVES IN THE WARHEAD...
... AND HE MUST SEE!
THE VISION MUST HAVE THE CLARITY OF LIFE.
IT MUST BRIDGE THE CHASM BETWEEN ILLUSION AND REALITY..
...BUT THEN, WHAT IS REALITY?

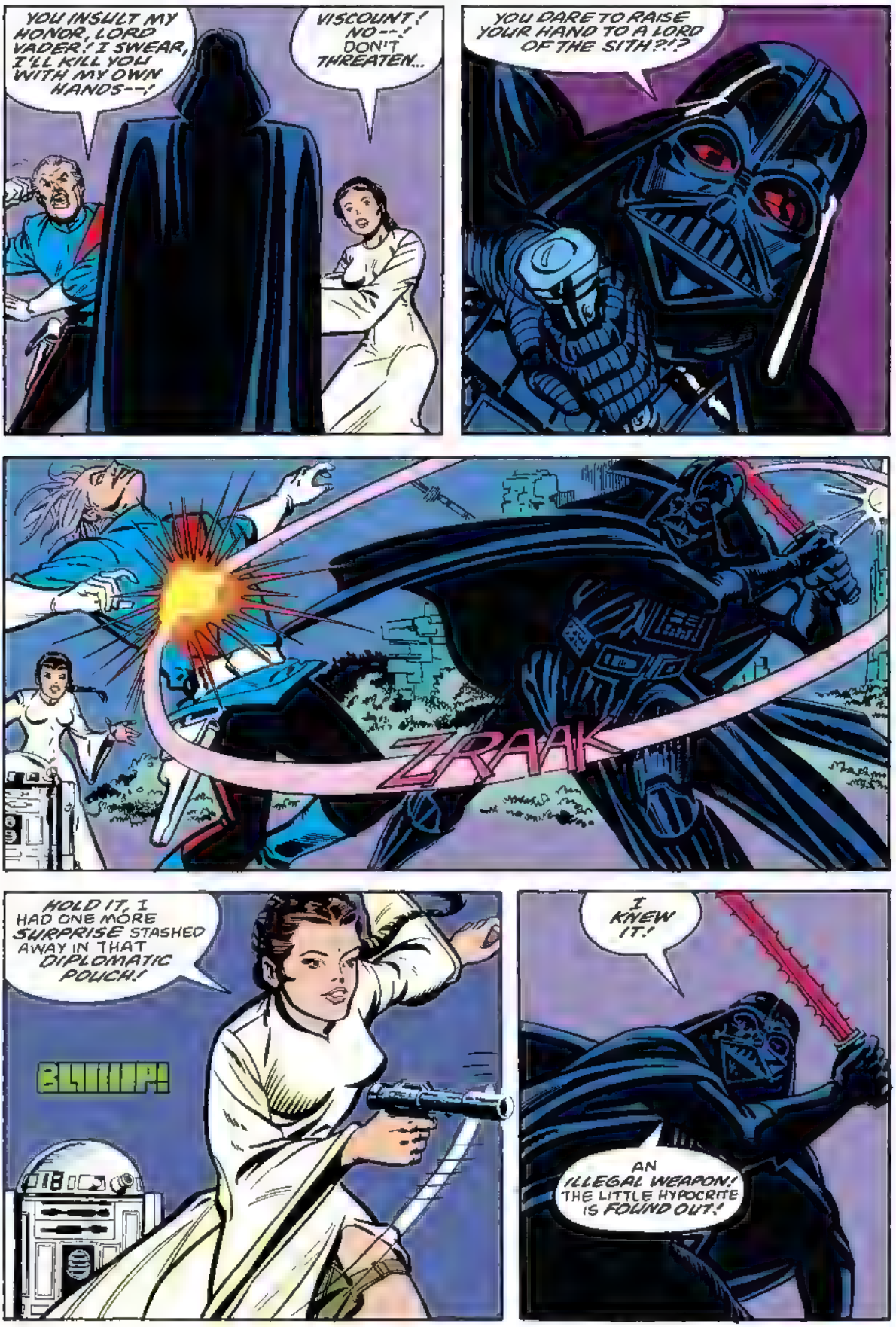

THOOM!

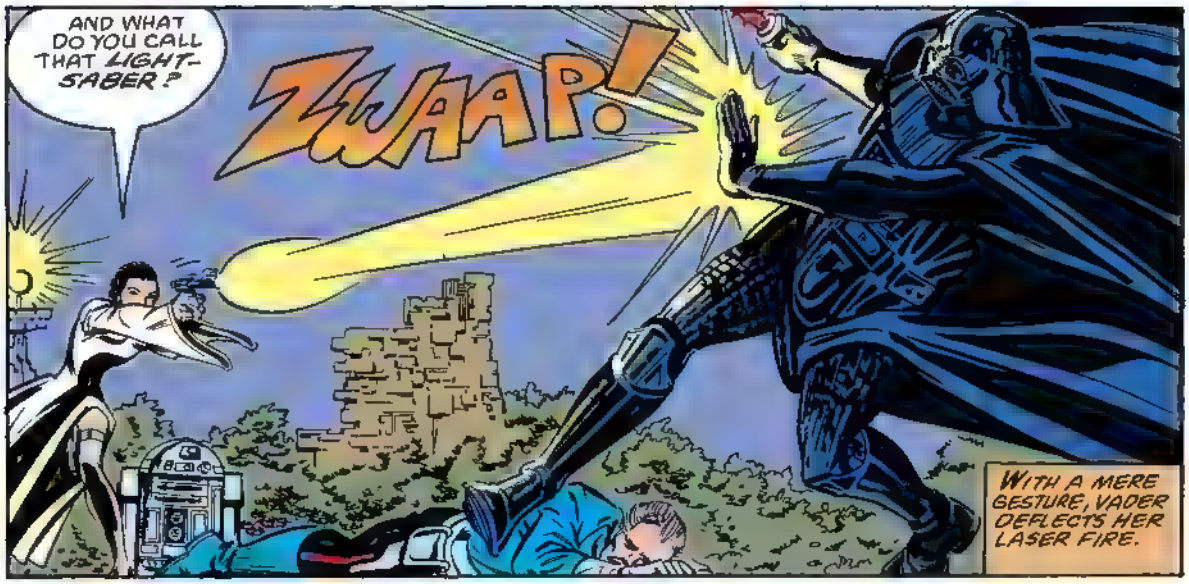

OH, BLAST! ARTOO, YOUR DISPLAY CIRCUITS ARE MALFUNCTIONING AGAIN?!
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PROJECTING A HOLOGRAM OF THE VISCOUNT OVER LORD VADER'S VALET?
BA-DEE-ET!
WHAT? FOR AS LONG AS YOU'VE BEEN PROJECTING A HOLOGRAM OF THE VALET OVER TARDI?

SORRY...
...THEY JUST DON'T MAKE DROIDS LIKE THEY USED TO.


I'D OFFER TO LEND YOU C-3PO, BUT HE'S IN THE SHOP FOR A TUNE-UP...!


THAT NIGHT...
PRINCESS LEIA! LORD VADER HAD A MESSAGE DELIVERED TO MY DROID MECHANIC! HE WANTS TO MEET WITH US TONIGHT AT THE OLD SPACE-PORT!
MY, HE'S MORE PREDICTABLE THAN I THOUGHT! THE ABANDONED SPACE-PORT WOULD HAVE BEEN MY CHOICE AS WELL!
BLIT!
WE'RE NOT GOING, ARE WE?
=YAWN= WELL, YOU'RE NOT!
BUT VISCOUNT TARDI, ARTOO AND I WILL BE THERE RIGHT ON SCHEDULE.
WE HAVE OTHER PLANS FOR YOU...!
MIDNIGHT AT THE OLD SPACE-PORT...
I HAVE OBEYED MY EMPEROR'S ORDERS. I HAVE WALKED THE RAZOR'S EDGE IN THE DIPLOMATIC SNAKEPIT.
BUT THE TIME FOR SUBTLETY IS PAST! MY PRIMARY MISSION IS TO STOP THE LOAN! YOU KNOW THAT I CAN DESTROY YOU AS EASILY AS I LIFT MY FINGER!
I HAVE NO WISH TO TREAD ON THE EMPEROR'S DELICATE DIPLOMATIC TOES, BUT IF I AM FORCED TO DO SO, I SHALL.
FORSAKE THE LOAN, LEAVE AARGAU AND LIVE TO FIGHT ME AGAIN. STAY, AND WE BOTH LOSE...THOUGH ONLY YOU SHALL LOSE YOUR LIVES!

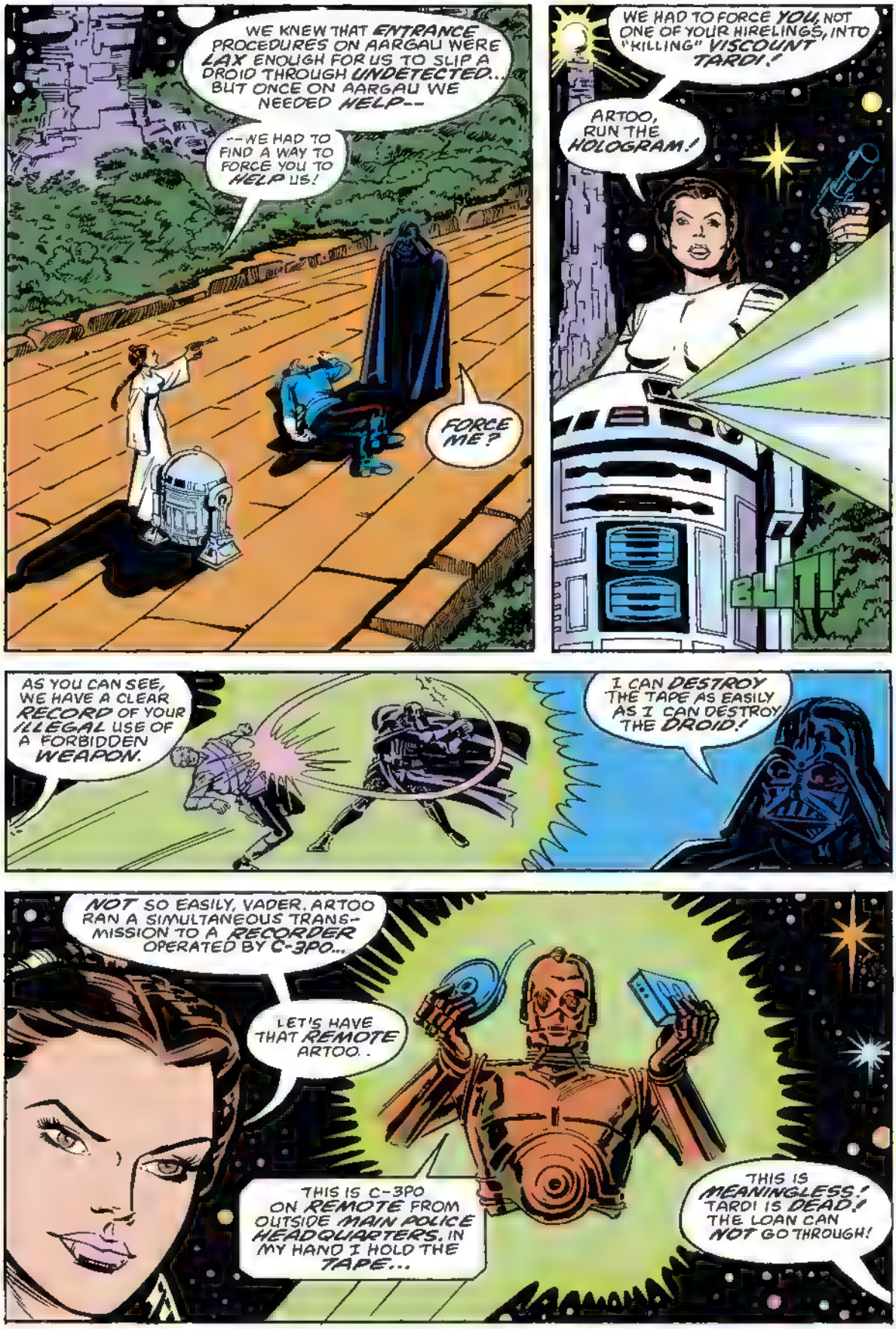

YOU INSULT MY HONOR, LORD VADER! I SWEAR, I'LL KILL YOU WITH MY OWN HANDS--!
VISCOUNT! NO--! DON'T THREATEN...
YOU DARE TO RAISE YOUR HAND TO A LORD OF THE SITH?!?
ZRAAK
HOLD IT, I HAD ONE MORE SURPRISE STASHED AWAY IN THAT DIPLOMATIC POUCH!
BLYHHP!
I KNEW IT!
AN ILLEGAL WEAPON! THE LITTLE HYPOCRITE IS FOUND OUT!


AND WHAT DO YOU CALL THAT LIGHT-SABER?
ZWAAP!
WITH A MERE GESTURE, VADER DEFLECTS HER LASER FIRE.

IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE NOW, PRINCESS. VISCOUNT TARDI IS DEAD. THERE WILL BE NO LOAN. THERE WILL BE NO NEW X-WING FIGHTER SQUADRON!

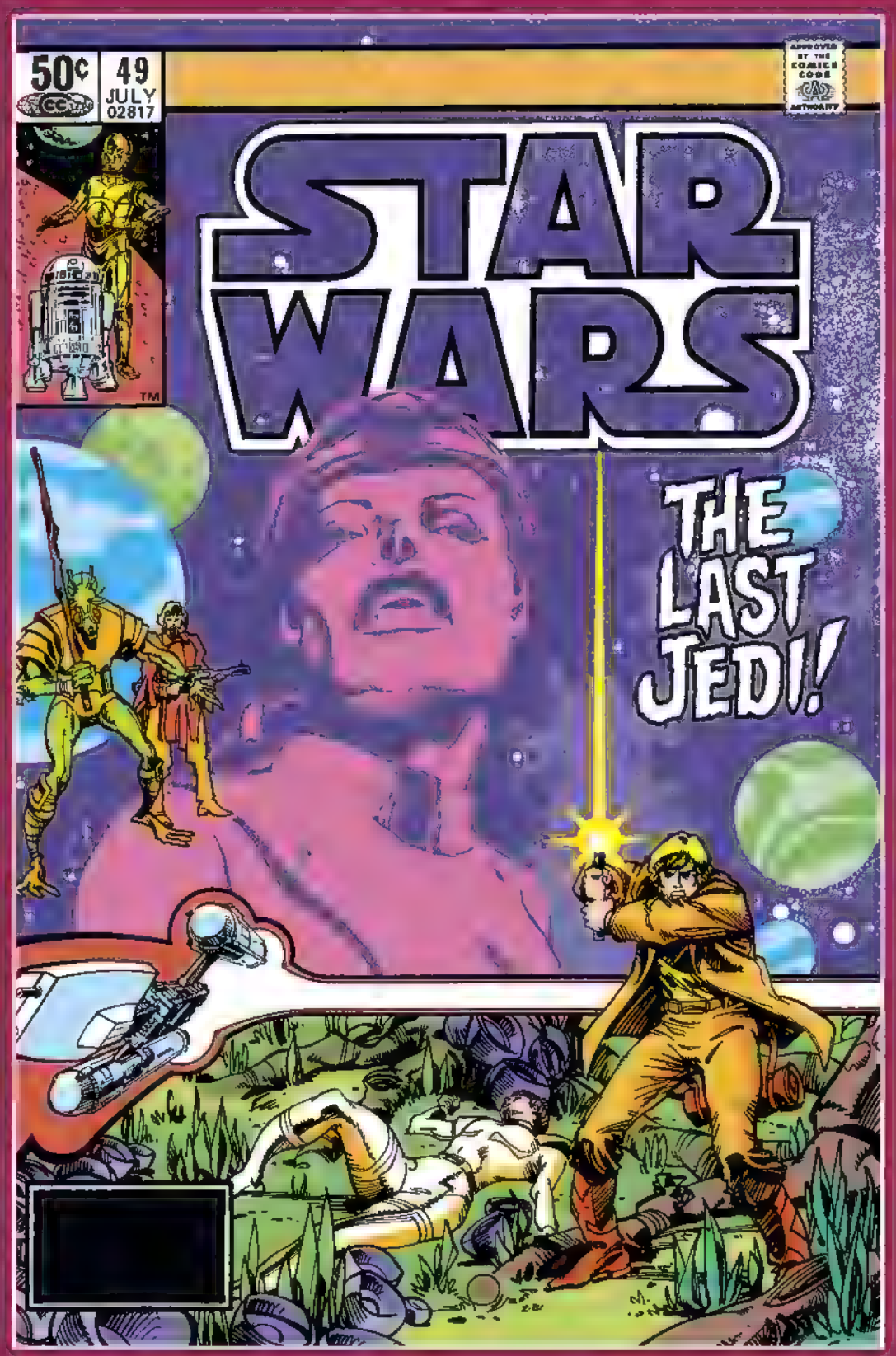
OF COURSE VISCOUNT TARDI IS DEAD. IN FACT, HE'S BEEN DEAD FOR OVER A MONTH NOW... BUT THERE SHALL BE A LOAN!

THE VISCOUNT'S DOCTOR, COMMANDER WILLARD, AND I WERE THE ONLY ONES PRIVY TO TARDI'S DEATH. WE DECIDED TO SEND A DROID IN HIS PLACE...
A CAREFULLY PROGRAMMED, NON-SENTIENT DROID, OF COURSE!


WE KNEW THAT ENTRANCE PROCEDURES ON AARGAU WERE LAX ENOUGH FOR US TO SLIP A DROID THROUGH UNDETECTED... BUT ONCE ON AARGAU WE NEEDED HELP--
--WE HAD TO FIND A WAY TO FORCE YOU TO HELP US!
FORCE ME?
WE HAD TO FORCE YOU, NOT ONE OF YOUR HIRELINGS, INTO "KILLING" VISCOUNT TARDI!
ARTOO, RUN THE HOLOGRAM!
BLIT!
AS YOU CAN SEE, WE HAVE A CLEAR RECORD OF YOUR ILLEGAL USE OF A FORBIDDEN WEAPON.
I CAN DESTROY THE TAPE AS EASILY AS I CAN DESTROY THE DROID!
NOT SO EASILY, VADER. ARTOO RAN A SIMULTANEOUS TRANSMISSION TO A RECORDER OPERATED BY C-3PO...
LET'S HAVE THAT REMOTE ARTOO.
THIS IS C-3PO ON REMOTE FROM OUTSIDE MAIN POLICE HEADQUARTERS. IN MY HAND I HOLD THE TAPE...
THIS IS MEANINGLESS! TARDI IS DEAD! THE LOAN CAN NOT GO THROUGH!

IT ALREADY HAS. INSTEAD OF THE BONDS AND DEEDS USUALLY PRESENTED AS COLLATERAL... I PRESENTED THE CROWN JEWELS OF ALDERAAN. THEY ARE UNMISTAKABLE AND VIRTUALLY PRICELESS.
"THE APPRAISERS VERIFIED THEIR AUTHENTICITY ON THE SPOT AND THE LOAN WAS APPROVED IMMEDIATELY.
"OUR BIG PROBLEM WAS THE PHONEY VISCOUNT. WE KNEW THE SENSORS WOULD SPOT HIM AT CUSTOMS--
VOID
"-- AND ONCE TARDI WAS DISCREDITED OUR LOAN WOULD BE CANCELLED... THAT'S WHY WE NEEDED YOUR HELP."
TARDI COULDN'T JUST DISAPPEAR. HE HAD TO DIE. YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE ON AARGAU WITH THE MOTIVE TO MURDER HIM-- AND THE RESOURCES TO MAKE HIS DEATH LOOK NATURAL.
YOU DID COME AWFULLY CLOSE WITH THOSE THREE ASSASSINS.
YOU KNOW, SOMETHING JUST TOLD ME YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO PART WITH YOUR LIGHTSABER!
!OOT!

OH, YES, YOU'LL HAVE TO GET RID OF THIS LASER BLASTER FOR ME ALSO... WE WOULDN'T WANT ANY NASTY COMPLICATIONS WITH THE WEAPONS LAW, NOW WOULD WE?
BUT THAT SHOULDN'T BE HALF AS DIFFICULT AS GETTING RID OF THE "BODY"...
OH, I'LL JUST INCLUDE THEM IN THE PACKAGE WHEN I SMUGGLE OUT MY REAL PRIMARY OBJECTIVE.
SMUGGLE? REAL PRIMARY OBJECTIVE?!
YES. THE CROWN JEWELS OF ALDERAAN.
THE WHAT?!
YOU'LL GET YOUR PIDDLING TOY FIGHTERS PRINCESS. THE LOAN IS QUITE VALID. IT WAS FAR MORE IMPORTANT TO DRAW THESE BAUBLES OUT INTO THE LIGHT OF DAY.
I BELIEVE THEY USED TO BACK YOUR CURRENCY.
BUT HOW?!
I BRIBED A BANK OFFICER. THE VISCOUNT'S DOCTOR HAS BEEN ON MY PAYROLL FOR TWO MONTHS. THE ASSASSINS WERE SIMPLY A DISTRACTION.
YOU HAD THE JEWELS-- WHY BOTHER TO MEET ME HERE?
TO TIDY THINGS UP, PRINCESS. IF TARDI WERE EXPOSED AS A DROID, THE LOAN WOULD SURELY BE QUESTIONED AND THE JEWELS WOULD BE MISSED.
I ALSO THOUGHT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADVISE YOU AGAINST MENTIONING ANY OF THIS TO THE AARGAUUN AUTHORITIES.
IT WOULD ONLY DO EVIL THINGS TO YOUR CREDIT RATING.
NEXT: THE LAST JEDI!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JULY
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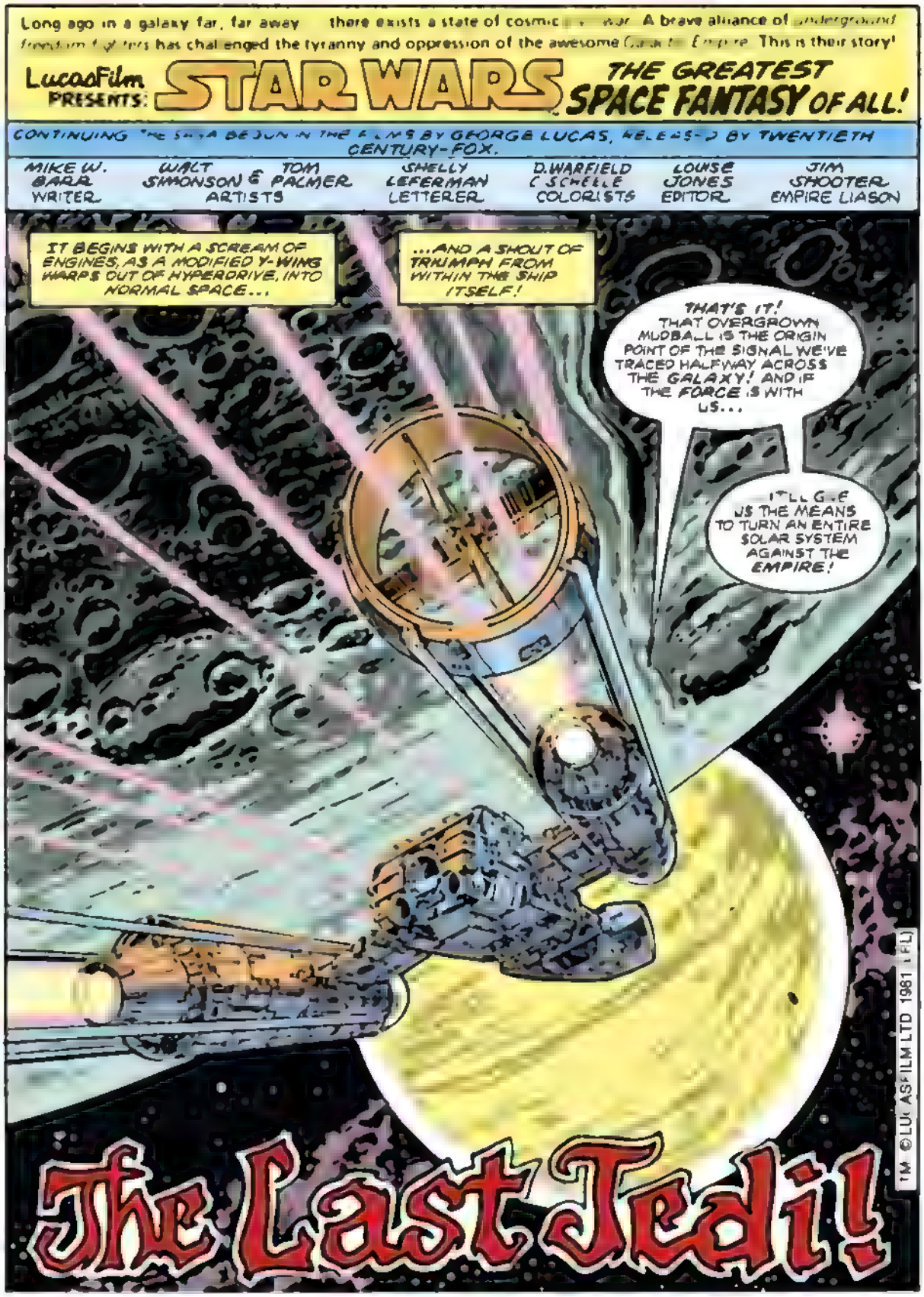
STAR WARS
THE LAST JEDI!


Long ago in a galaxy far, far away there exists a state of cosmic war. A brave alliance of underground freedom fighters has challenged the tyranny and oppression of the awesome Galactic Empire. This is their story!
LucasFilm PRESENTS: STAR WARS THE GREATEST SPACE FANTASY OF ALL!
CONTINUING THE SAGA BEGUN IN THE FILMS BY GEORGE LUCAS, RELEASED BY TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX.
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D.WARFIELD C.SCHELLE COLORISTS
LOUISE JONES EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER EMPIRE LIASON
IT BEGINS WITH A SCREAM OF ENGINES, AS A MODIFIED Y-WING WARPS OUT OF HYPERDRIVE, INTO NORMAL SPACE...
...AND A SHOUT OF TRIUMPH FROM WITHIN THE SHIP ITSELF!
THAT'S IT! THAT OVERGROWN MUDBALL IS THE ORIGIN POINT OF THE SIGNAL WE'VE TRACED HALFWAY ACROSS THE GALAXY! AND IF THE FORCE IS WITH US...
IT'LL GIVE US THE MEANS TO TURN AN ENTIRE SOLAR SYSTEM AGAINST THE EMPIRE!
The Last Jedi!
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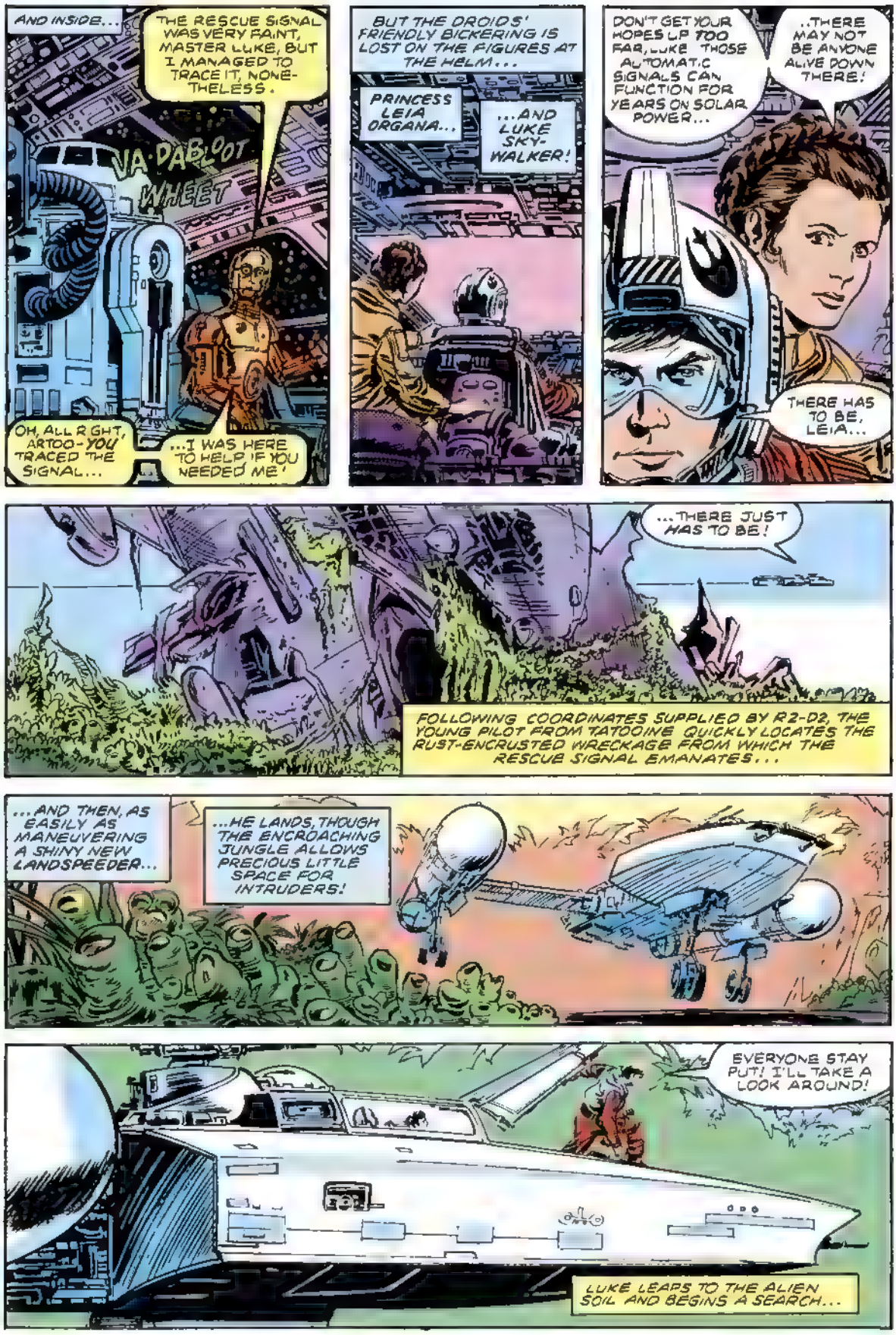
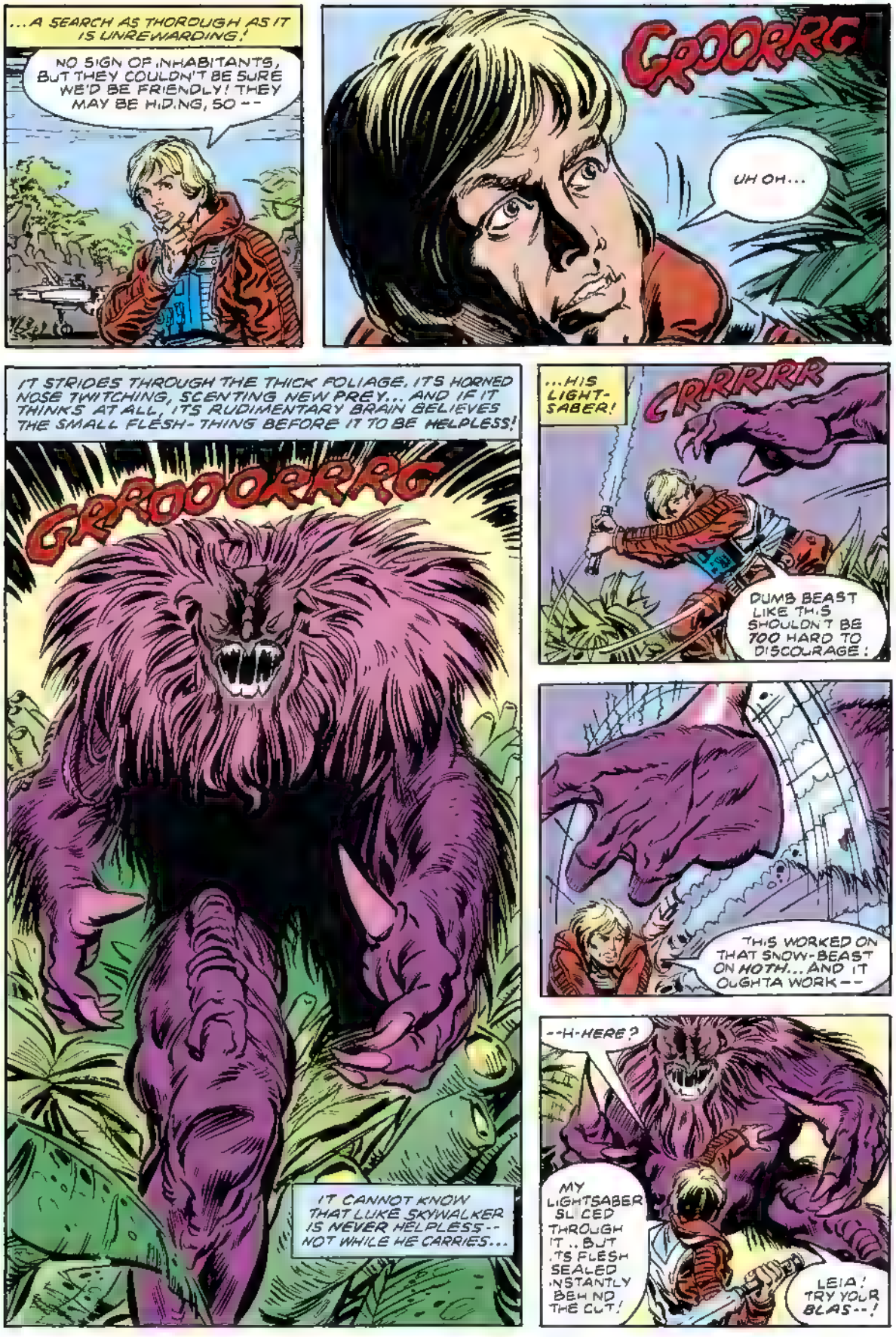
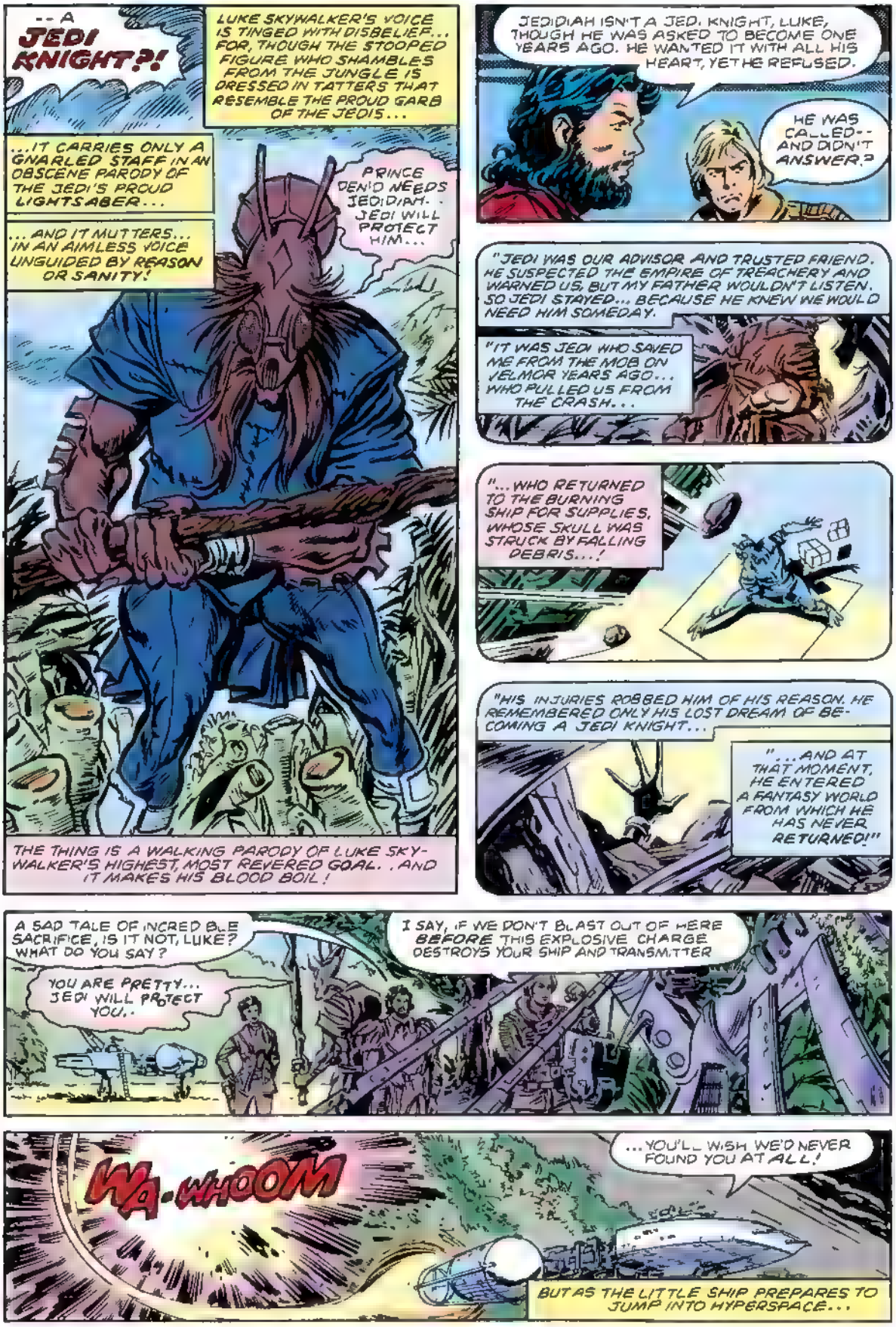
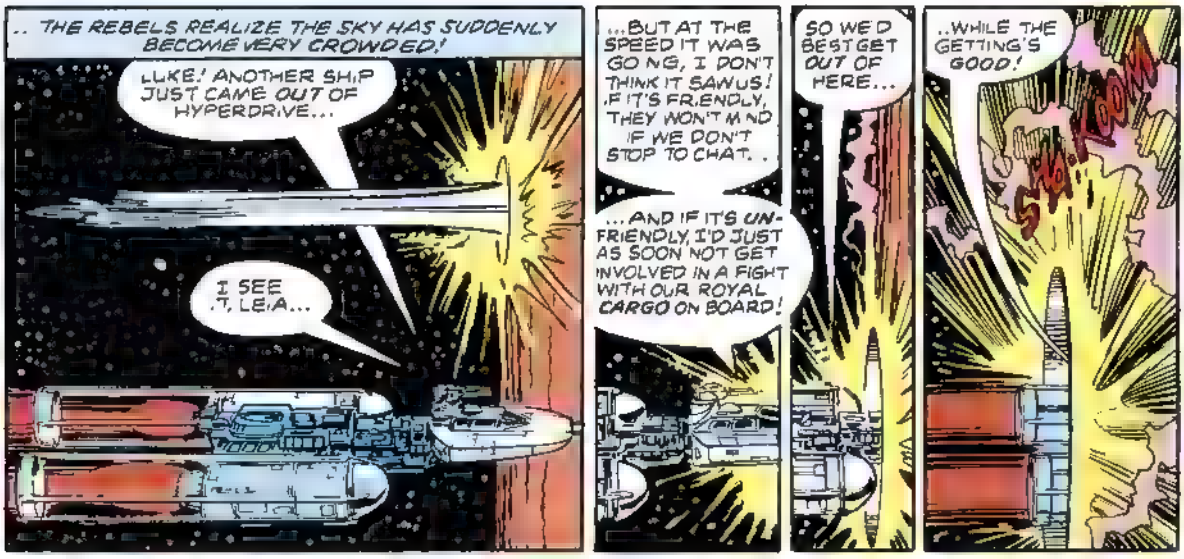
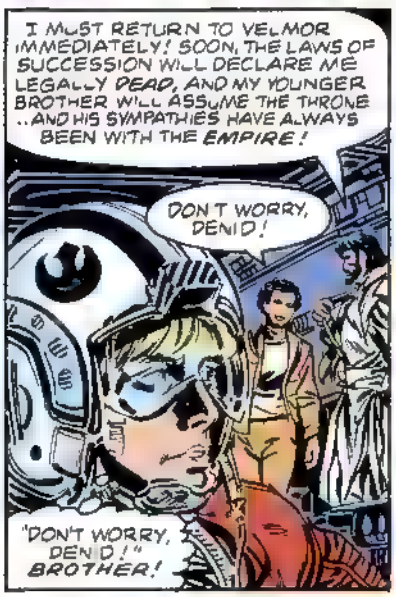

AND INSIDE...
THE RESCUE SIGNAL WAS VERY FAINT, MASTER LUKE, BUT I MANAGED TO TRACE IT, NONETHELESS.
VA-DAB-DOT WHEET
OH, ALL RIGHT, ARTOO-YOU TRACED THE SIGNAL...
...I WAS HERE TO HELP IF YOU NEEDED ME!
BUT THE DROIDS' FRIENDLY BICKERING IS LOST ON THE FIGURES AT THE HELM...
PRINCESS LEIA ORGANA...
...AND LUKE SKYWALKER!
DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP TOO FAR, LUKE. THOSE AUTOMATIC SIGNALS CAN FUNCTION FOR YEARS ON SOLAR POWER...
..THERE MAY NOT BE ANYONE ALIVE DOWN THERE!
THERE HAS TO BE, LEIA...
...THERE JUST HAS TO BE!
FOLLOWING COORDINATES SUPPLIED BY R2-D2, THE YOUNG PILOT FROM TATOOINE QUICKLY LOCATES THE RUST-ENCRUSTED WRECKAGE FROM WHICH THE RESCUE SIGNAL EMANATES...
...AND THEN, AS EASILY AS MANEUVERING A SHINY NEW LANDSPEEDER...
...HE LANDS, THOUGH THE ENCROACHING JUNGLE ALLOWS PRECIOUS LITTLE SPACE FOR INTRUDERS!
EVERYONE STAY PUT! I'LL TAKE A LOOK AROUND!
LUKE LEAPS TO THE ALIEN SOIL AND BEGINS A SEARCH...


...A SEARCH AS THOROUGH AS IT IS UNREWARDING!
NO SIGN OF INHABITANTS, BUT THEY COULDN'T BE SURE WE'D BE FRIENDLY! THEY MAY BE HIDING, SO --
GROORG
UH OH...
IT STRIDES THROUGH THE THICK FOLIAGE, ITS HORNED NOSE TWITCHING, SCENTING NEW PREY... AND IF IT THINKS AT ALL, ITS RUDIMENTARY BRAIN BELIEVES THE SMALL FLESH-THING BEFORE IT TO BE HELPLESS!
GRROOORRRG
IT CANNOT KNOW THAT LUKE SKYWALKER IS NEVER HELPLESS-- NOT WHILE HE CARRIES...
...HIS LIGHT-SABER!
GRRRRRR
DUMB BEAST LIKE THIS SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD TO DISCOURAGE!
THIS WORKED ON THAT SNOW-BEAST ON HOTH... AND IT OUGHTA WORK--
--H-HERE?
MY LIGHTSABER SLICED THROUGH IT.. BUT ITS FLESH SEALED INSTANTLY BEHIND THE CUT!
LEIA! TRY YOUR BLAS--!

BUT BEFORE LUKE CAN COMPLETE HIS SENTENCE...
ZZZZP
GRRUOO
THE CREATURE ...IT'S DEAD!
LEIA--?
I FIRED, STRANGER--IT TAKES AN ANTI-MAGNETIC POLARIZATION RAY TO PUT THOSE THINGS IN THEIR PLACE!
AND UNLESS YOU TELL ME WHO YOU ARE ...AND WHETHER YOU'RE EMPIRE OR FRIENDLY--
--YOU'LL BE NEXT!
I'M LEIA, HE'S LUKE--WE'RE WITH THE REBEL ALLIANCE ...AND IF YOU'RE PRINCE DENID OF VELMOR
. . WE'VE COME A LONG WAY TO FIND YOU--AND IT WAS WORTH THE TRIP!
HUMPH!
WELL, WHAT'S THE STORY, FELLA... ARE YOU PRINCE DENID?
I AM.
THAT'S EASY ENOUGH TO CHECK OUT... BUT IF YOU ARE, THEN HOW DID YOU GET HERE?
"YEARS AGO," REPLIES THE PRINCE, "A MOB, BOUGHT BY EMPIRE GOLD, STORMED OUR PALACE AND SLEW MY PARENTS. MY YOUNGER BROTHER, AN IMPERIAL SYMPATHIZER, WAS NOT HARMED
"BUT CHILD THOUGH I WAS, I WAS ANTI-IMPERIAL AND I WAS SUCCESSOR TO THE THRONE.
"MY LIFE WAS AS GOOD AS FORFEIT!
"MY BETROTHED AND I WERE FORCED TO FLEE..."
..IN TOO MUCH OF A HURRY, I FEAR! OUR FUEL WAS LOW, AND WE CRASHED HERE!
THE CRASH TOOK THE LIFE OF MY BETROTHED, LOREN... HER BODY LIES NEATH THAT BURIAL CAIRN.
...AND THE TWO OF US HAVE LIVED HERE EVER SINCE!
THE TWO OF YOU? BUT IF YOUR BETROTHED DIED, THEN--
--SOMETHING'S COMING! WHAT--
CALM YOURSELF, LUKE IT IS MERELY THE THIRD MEMBER OF MY PARTY--THE MAN TO WHOM I OWE MY LIFE!
NO! HE CAN'T BE..

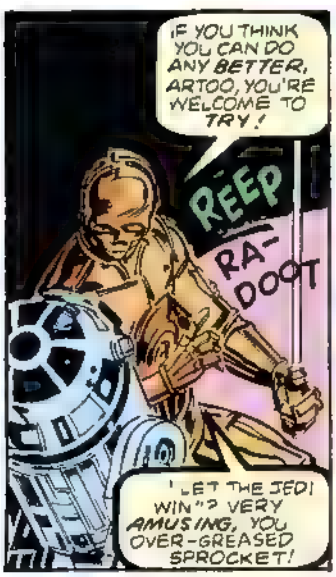

-- A JEDI KNIGHT?!
LUKE SKYWALKER'S VOICE IS TINGED WITH DISBELIEF... FOR, THOUGH THE STOOPED FIGURE WHO SHAMBLES FROM THE JUNGLE IS DRESSED IN TATTERS THAT RESEMBLE THE PROUD GARB OF THE JEDIS...
...IT CARRIES ONLY A GNARLED STAFF IN AN OBSCENE PARODY OF THE JEDI'S PROUD LIGHTSABER...
...AND IT MUTTERS... IN AN AIMLESS VOICE UNGUIDED BY REASON OR SANITY!
PRINCE DENIO NEEDS JEDIDIAH... JEDI WILL PROTECT HIM...
THE THING IS A WALKING PARODY OF LUKE SKYWALKER'S HIGHEST, MOST REVERED GOAL. . AND IT MAKES HIS BLOOD BOIL!
JEDIDIAH ISN'T A JEDI KNIGHT, LUKE, THOUGH HE WAS ASKED TO BECOME ONE YEARS AGO. HE WANTED IT WITH ALL HIS HEART, YET HE REFUSED.
HE WAS CALLED-- AND DIDN'T ANSWER.
"JEDI WAS OUR ADVISOR AND TRUSTED FRIEND. HE SUSPECTED THE EMPIRE OF TREACHERY AND WARNED US, BUT MY FATHER WOULDN'T LISTEN. SO JEDI STAYED... BECAUSE HE KNEW WE WOULD NEED HIM SOMEDAY.
"IT WAS JEDI WHO SAVED ME FROM THE MOB ON JELMOR YEARS AGO... WHO PULLED US FROM THE CRASH...
"... WHO RETURNED TO THE BURNING SHIP FOR SUPPLIES, WHOSE SKULL WAS STRUCK BY FALLING DEBRIS...!
"HIS INJURIES ROBBED HIM OF HIS REASON. HE REMEMBERED ONLY HIS LOST DREAM OF BECOMING A JEDI KNIGHT...
"... AND AT THAT MOMENT, HE ENTERED A FANTASY WORLD FROM WHICH HE HAS NEVER RETURNED!"
A SAD TALE OF INCRED BLE SACRIFICE, IS IT NOT, LUKE? WHAT DO YOU SAY?
YOU ARE PRETTY... JEDI WILL PROTECT YOU..
I SAY, IF WE DON'T BLAST OUT OF HERE BEFORE THIS EXPLOSIVE CHARGE DESTROYS YOUR SHIP AND TRANSMITTER
WA-WHOOM
...YOU'LL WISH WE'D NEVER FOUND YOU AT ALL!
BUT AS THE LITTLE SHIP PREPARES TO JUMP INTO HYPERSPACE...

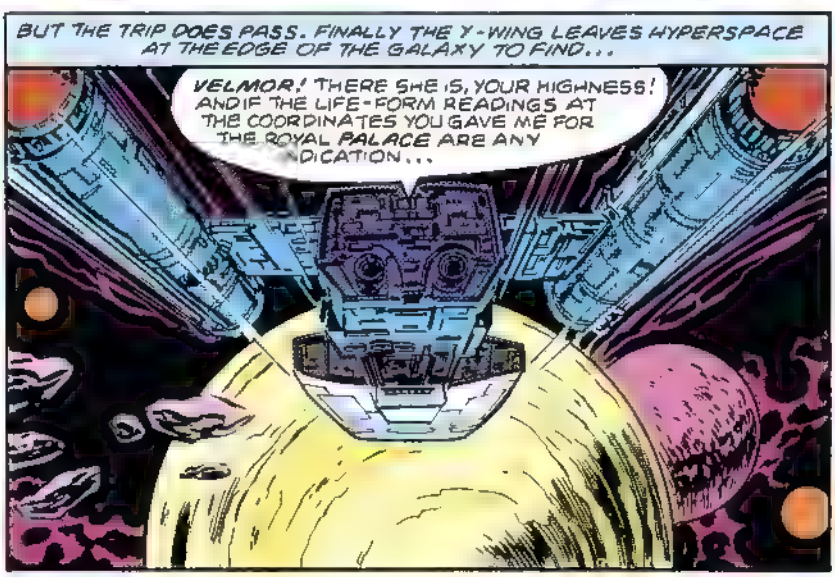

.. THE REBELS REALIZE THE SKY HAS SUDDENLY BECOME VERY CROWDED!
LUKE! ANOTHER SHIP JUST CAME OUT OF HYPERDRIVE...
I SEE IT, LEIA...
...BUT AT THE SPEED IT WAS GOING, I DON'T THINK IT SAW US! IF IT'S FRIENDLY, THEY WON'T MIND IF WE DON'T STOP TO CHAT. .
...AND IF IT'S UNFRIENDLY, I'D JUST AS SOON NOT GET INVOLVED IN A FIGHT WITH OUR ROYAL CARGO ON BOARD!
SO WE'D BEST GET OUT OF HERE...
..WHILE THE GETTING'S GOOD!
SA-KOOM

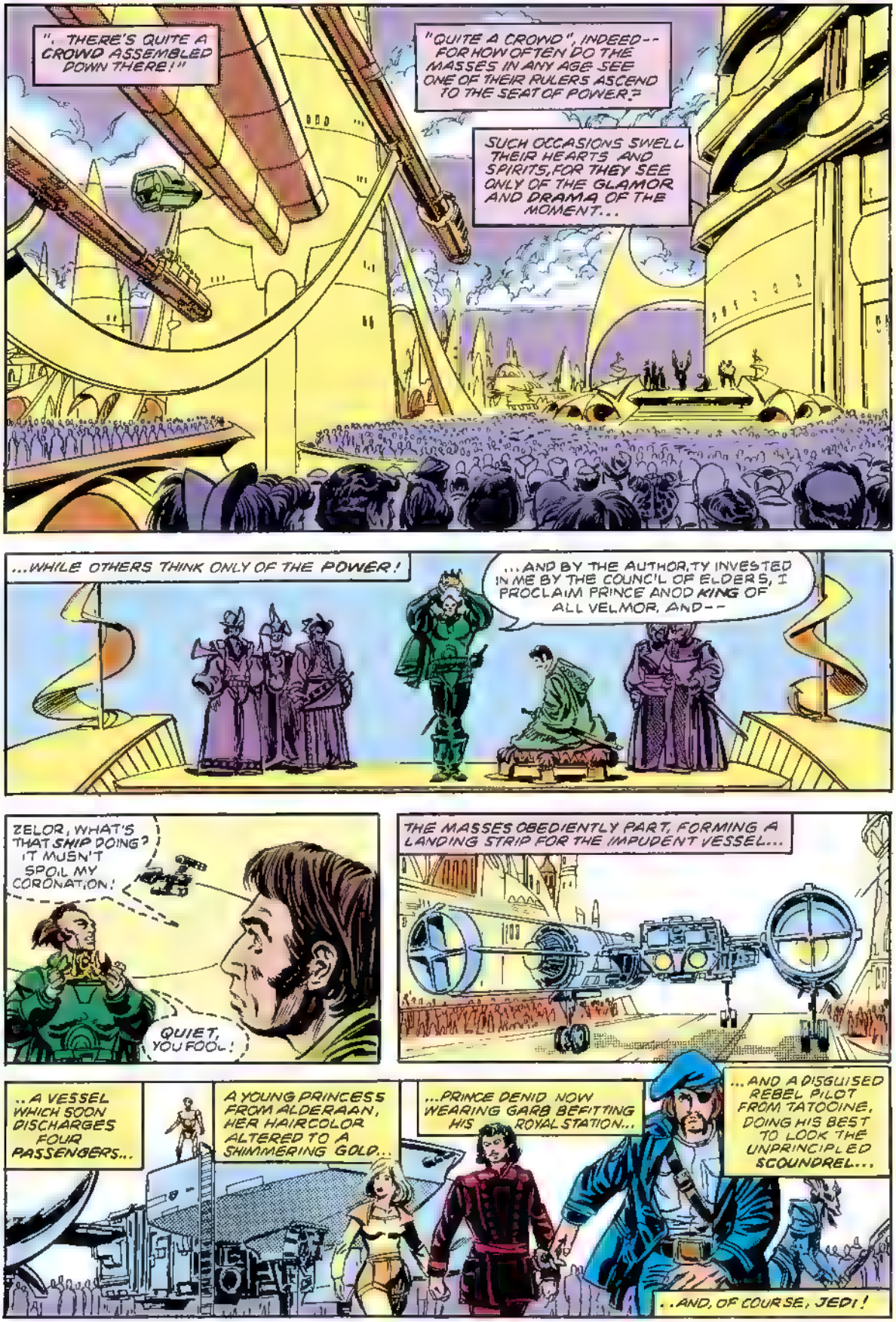

I MUST RETURN TO VELMOR IMMEDIATELY! SOON, THE LAWS OF SUCCESSION WILL DECLARE ME LEGALLY DEAD, AND MY YOUNGER BROTHER WILL ASSUME THE THRONE ..AND HIS SYMPATHIES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN WITH THE EMPIRE!
DON'T WORRY, DENIS!
"DON'T WORRY, DENIS!" BROTHER!

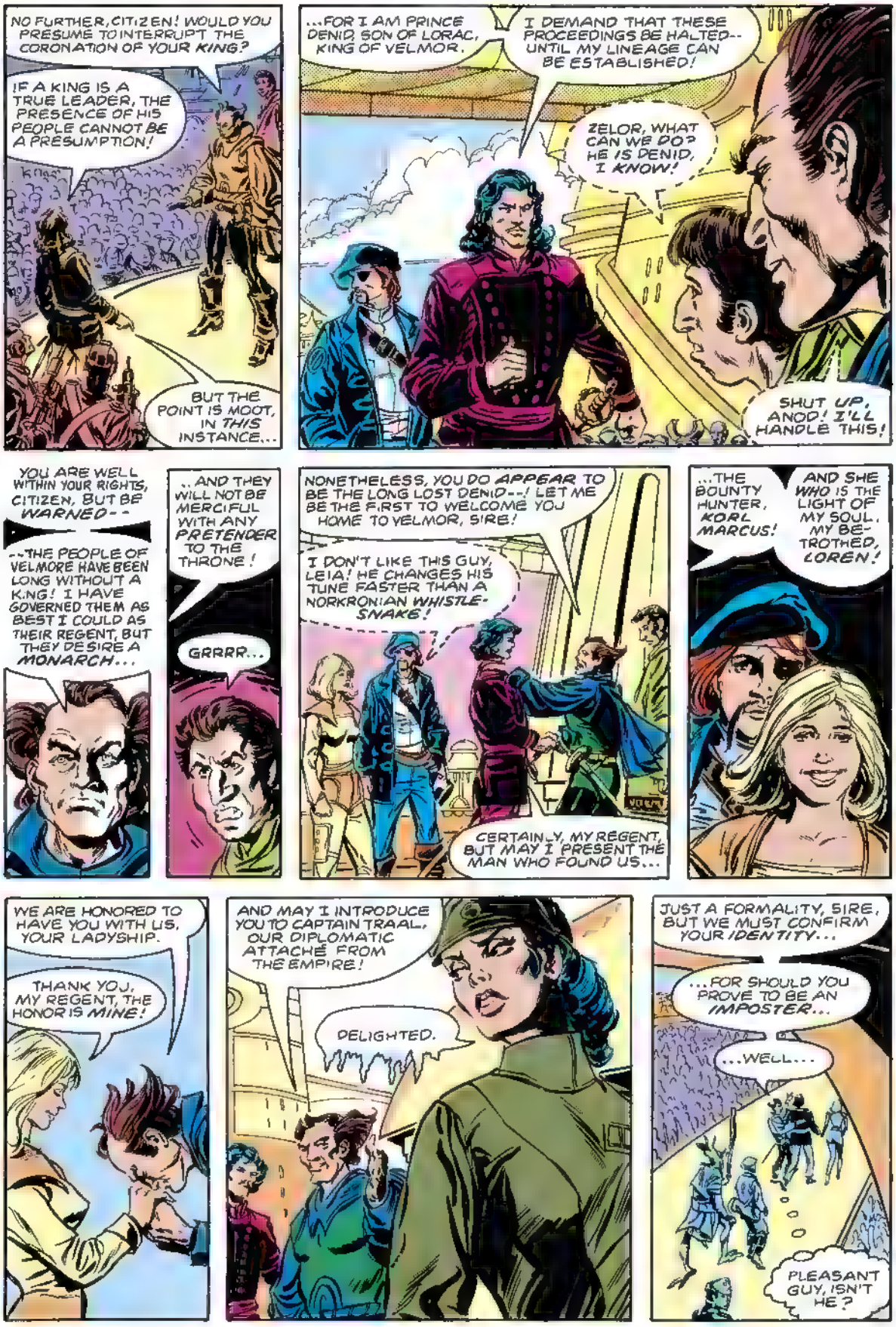
IN THE ENSUING DAYS, PRINCE DENIS LEARN THAT THE REBELS TRACED HIS FAINT BROADCAST ON THE FAINTER HOPE THAT HE MIGHT YET LIVE...AND USE HIS INFLUENCE TO TURN HIS PLANET AGAINST THE EMPIRE!
HE TAKES GREAT PLEASURE IN THE CIVILIZED COMFORTS THE Y-WING PROVIDES AND EVEN GREATER PLEASURE FROM THE COMPANY OF PRINCESS LEIA!

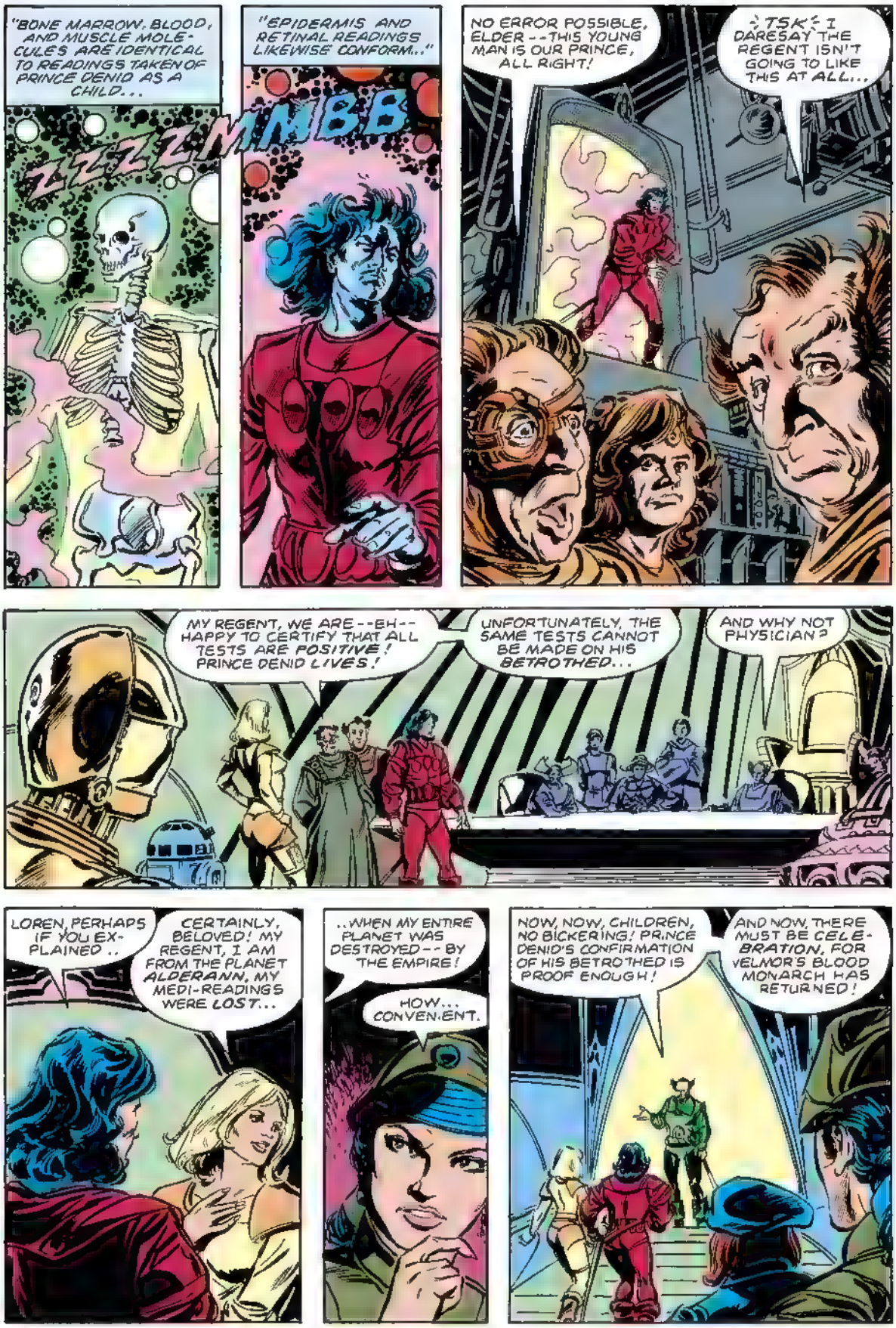
OF COURSE, THE TRIP IS NOT SO ENJOYABLE FOR ALL...
JEDI STRIKES... WITH HIS LIGHT-SABER...
KLONK
SIR, REALLY..!

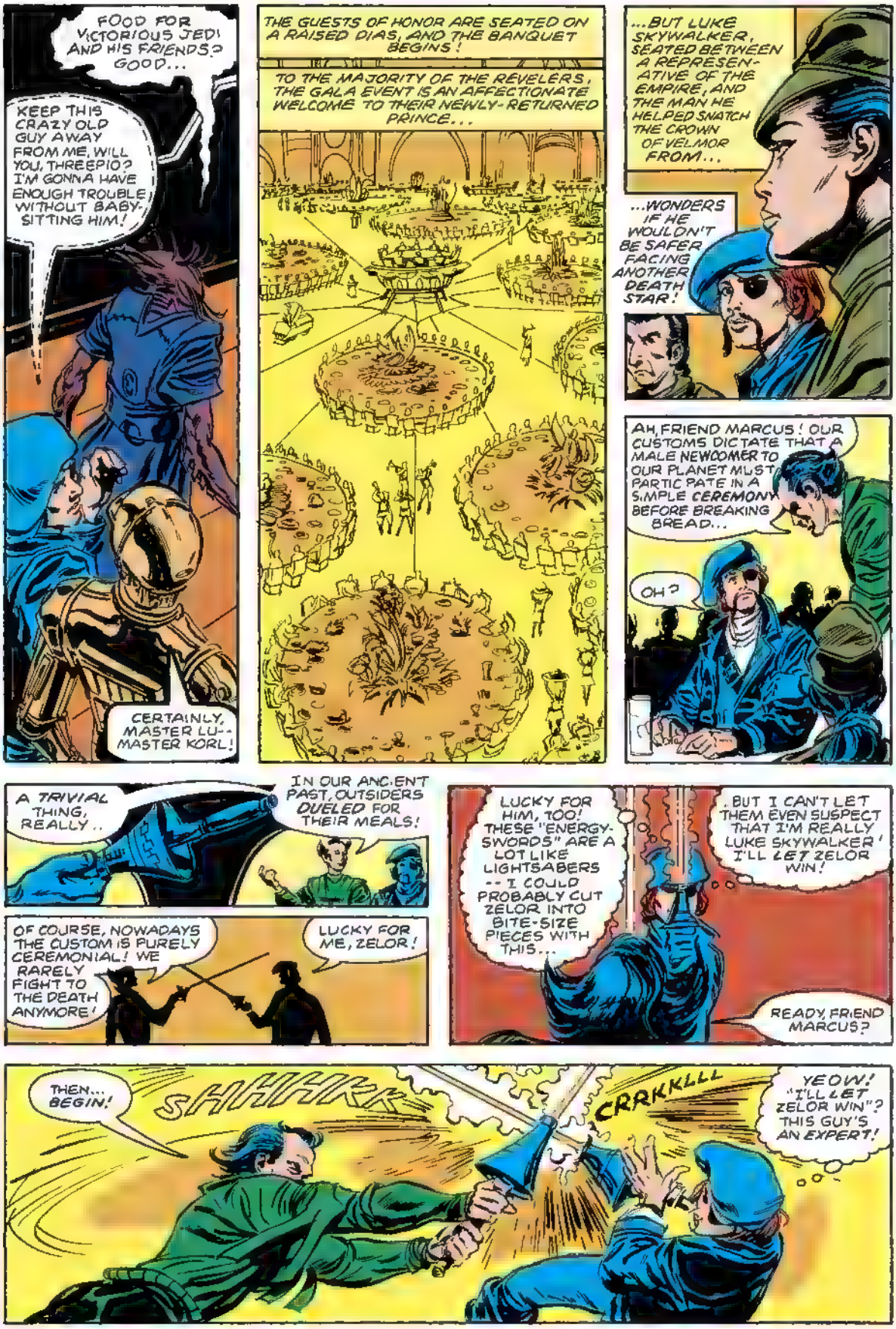

IF YOU THINK YOU CAN DO ANY BETTER, ARTOO, YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRY!
REEP
RA-DOOT
"LET THE JEDI WIN"? VERY AMUSING, YOU OVER-GREASED SPROCKET!


BUT THE TRIP DOES PASS. FINALLY THE Y-WING LEAVES HYPERSPACE AT THE EDGE OF THE GALAXY TO FIND...
VELMOR! THERE SHE IS, YOUR HIGHNESS! AND IF THE LIFE-FORM READINGS AT THE COORDINATES YOU GAVE ME FOR THE ROYAL PALACE ARE ANY INDICATION...


", THERE'S QUITE A CROWD ASSEMBLED DOWN THERE!"
"QUITE A CROWD", INDEED-- FOR HOW OFTEN DO THE MASSES IN ANY AGE SEE ONE OF THEIR RULERS ASCEND TO THE SEAT OF POWER?
SUCH OCCASIONS SWELL THEIR HEARTS AND SPIRITS, FOR THEY SEE ONLY OF THE GLAMOR AND DRAMA OF THE MOMENT...
...WHILE OTHERS THINK ONLY OF THE POWER!
...AND BY THE AUTHORITY INVESTED IN ME BY THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS, I PROCLAIM PRINCE ANOD KING OF ALL VELMOR, AND--
ZELOR, WHAT'S THAT SHIP DOING? IT MUSN'T SPOIL MY CORONATION!
QUIET, YOU FOOL!
THE MASSES OBEDIENTLY PART, FORMING A LANDING STRIP FOR THE IMPUDENT VESSEL...
...A VESSEL WHICH SOON DISCHARGES FOUR PASSENGERS...
A YOUNG PRINCESS FROM ALDERAAN, HER HAIRCOLOR ALTERED TO A SHIMMERING GOLD...
...PRINCE DENID NOW WEARING GARB BEFITTING HIS ROYAL STATION...
...AND A DISGUISED REBEL PILOT FROM TATOOINE, DOING HIS BEST TO LOOK THE UNPRINCIPLED SCOUNDREL...
..AND, OF COURSE, JEDI!

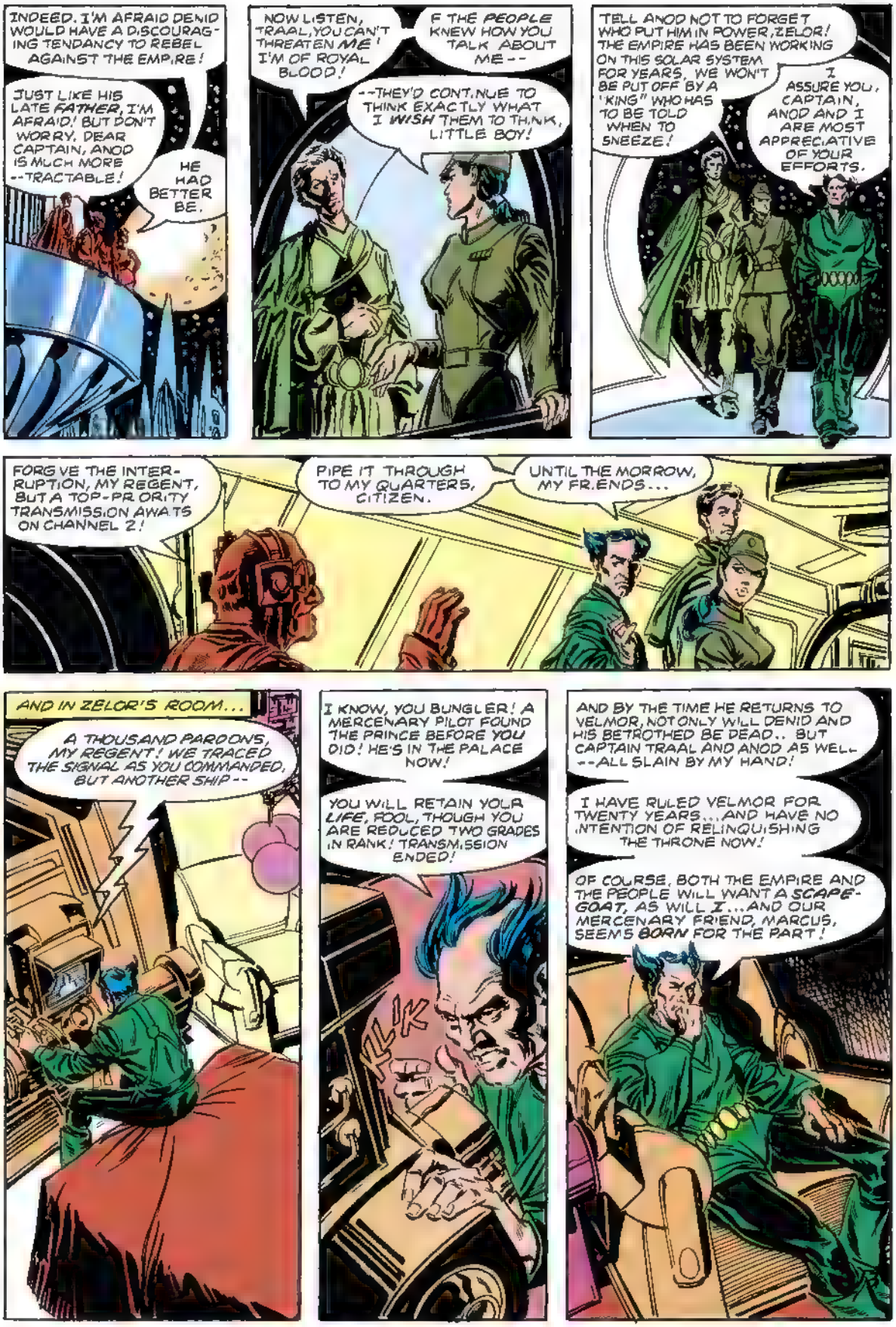

NO FURTHER, CITIZEN! WOULD YOU PRESUME TO INTERRUPT THE CORONATION OF YOUR KING?
IF A KING IS A TRUE LEADER, THE PRESENCE OF HIS PEOPLE CANNOT BE A PRESUMPTION!
BUT THE POINT IS MOOT, IN THIS INSTANCE...
...FOR I AM PRINCE DENID, SON OF LORAC, KING OF VELMOR.
I DEMAND THAT THESE PROCEEDINGS BE HALTED-- UNTIL MY LINEAGE CAN BE ESTABLISHED!
ZELOR, WHAT CAN WE DO? HE IS DENID, I KNOW!
SHUT UP, ANOD! I'LL HANDLE THIS!
YOU ARE WELL WITHIN YOUR RIGHTS, CITIZEN, BUT BE WARNED--
--THE PEOPLE OF VELMORE HAVE BEEN LONG WITHOUT A KING! I HAVE GOVERNED THEM AS BEST I COULD AS THEIR REGENT, BUT THEY DESIRE A MONARCH...
.. AND THEY WILL NOT BE MERCIFUL WITH ANY PRETENDER TO THE THRONE!
GRRRR...
NONETHELESS, YOU DO APPEAR TO BE THE LONG LOST DENID--! LET ME BE THE FIRST TO WELCOME YOU HOME TO VELMOR, SIRE!
I DON'T LIKE THIS GUY, LEIA! HE CHANGES HIS TUNE FASTER THAN A NORKRONIAN WHISTLE-SNAKE!
CERTAINLY, MY REGENT, BUT MAY I PRESENT THE MAN WHO FOUND US...
...THE BOUNTY HUNTER, KORL MARCUS!
AND SHE WHO IS THE LIGHT OF MY SOUL, MY BE-TROTHED, LOREN!
WE ARE HONORED TO HAVE YOU WITH US, YOUR LADYSHIP.
THANK YOU, MY REGENT, THE HONOR IS MINE!
AND MAY I INTRODUCE YOU TO CAPTAIN TRAAL, OUR DIPLOMATIC ATTACHÉ FROM THE EMPIRE!
DELIGHTED.
JUST A FORMALITY, SIRE, BUT WE MUST CONFIRM YOUR IDENTITY...
...FOR SHOULD YOU PROVE TO BE AN IMPOSTER...
...WELL...
PLEASANT GUY, ISN'T HE?

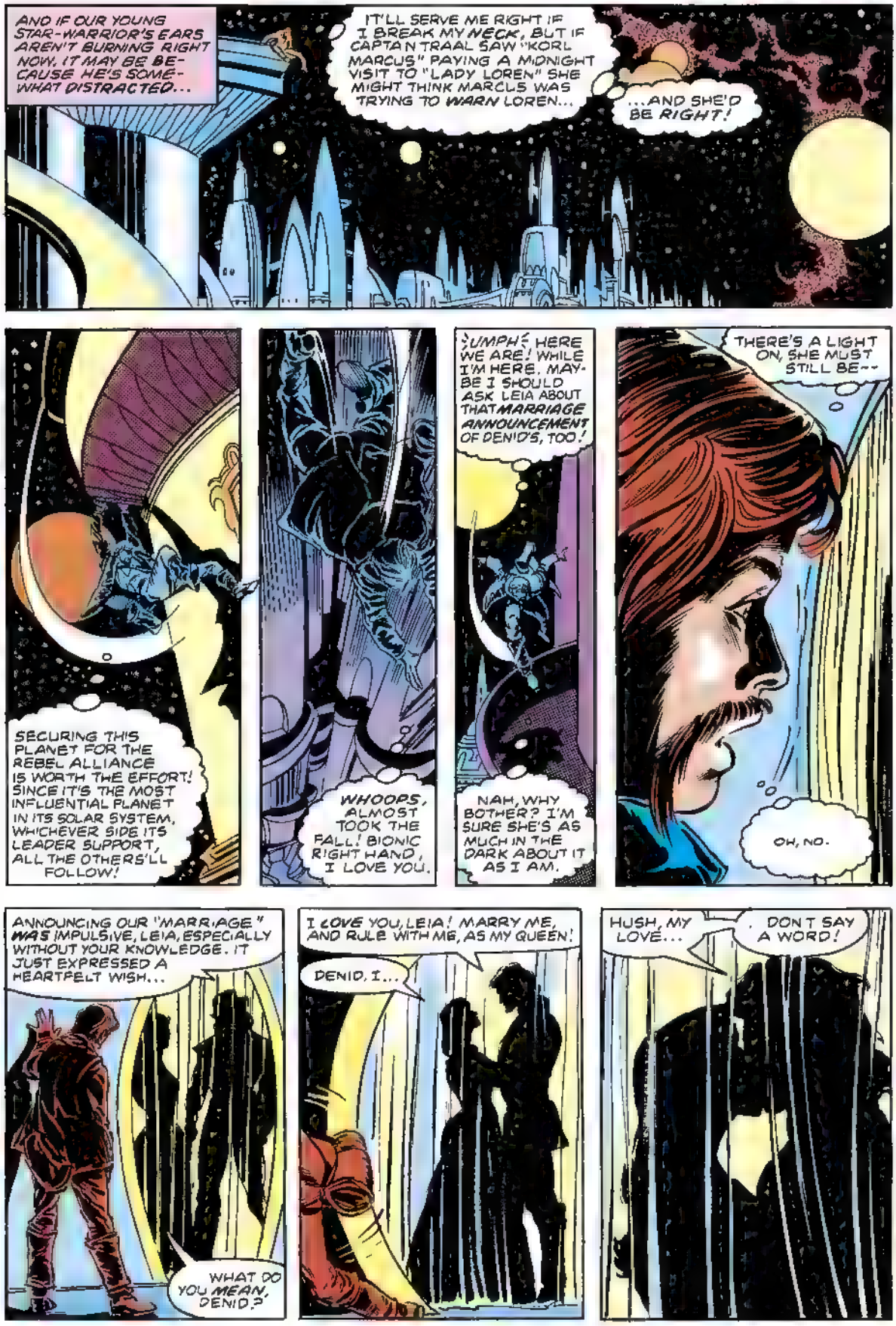

"BONE MARROW, BLOOD, AND MUSCLE MOLECULES ARE IDENTICAL TO READINGS TAKEN OF PRINCE DENIO AS A CHILD...
ZZZZZMMBB
"EPIDERMIS AND RETINAL READINGS LIKEWISE CONFORM..."
NO ERROR POSSIBLE, ELDER--THIS YOUNG MAN IS OUR PRINCE, ALL RIGHT!
"TSK" I DARESAY THE REGENT ISN'T GOING TO LIKE THIS AT ALL...
MY REGENT, WE ARE--EH--HAPPY TO CERTIFY THAT ALL TESTS ARE POSITIVE! PRINCE DENIO LIVES!
UNFORTUNATELY, THE SAME TESTS CANNOT BE MADE ON HIS BETROTHED...
AND WHY NOT PHYSICIAN?
LOREN, PERHAPS IF YOU EXPLAINED..
CERTAINLY, BELOVED! MY REGENT, I AM FROM THE PLANET ALDERANN, MY MEDI-READINGS WERE LOST...
..WHEN MY ENTIRE PLANET WAS DESTROYED--BY THE EMPIRE!
HOW... CONVENIENT.
NOW, NOW, CHILDREN, NO BICKERING! PRINCE DENIO'S CONFIRMATION OF HIS BETROTHED IS PROOF ENOUGH!
AND NOW, THERE MUST BE CELEBRATION, FOR VELMOR'S BLOOD MONARCH HAS RETURNED!

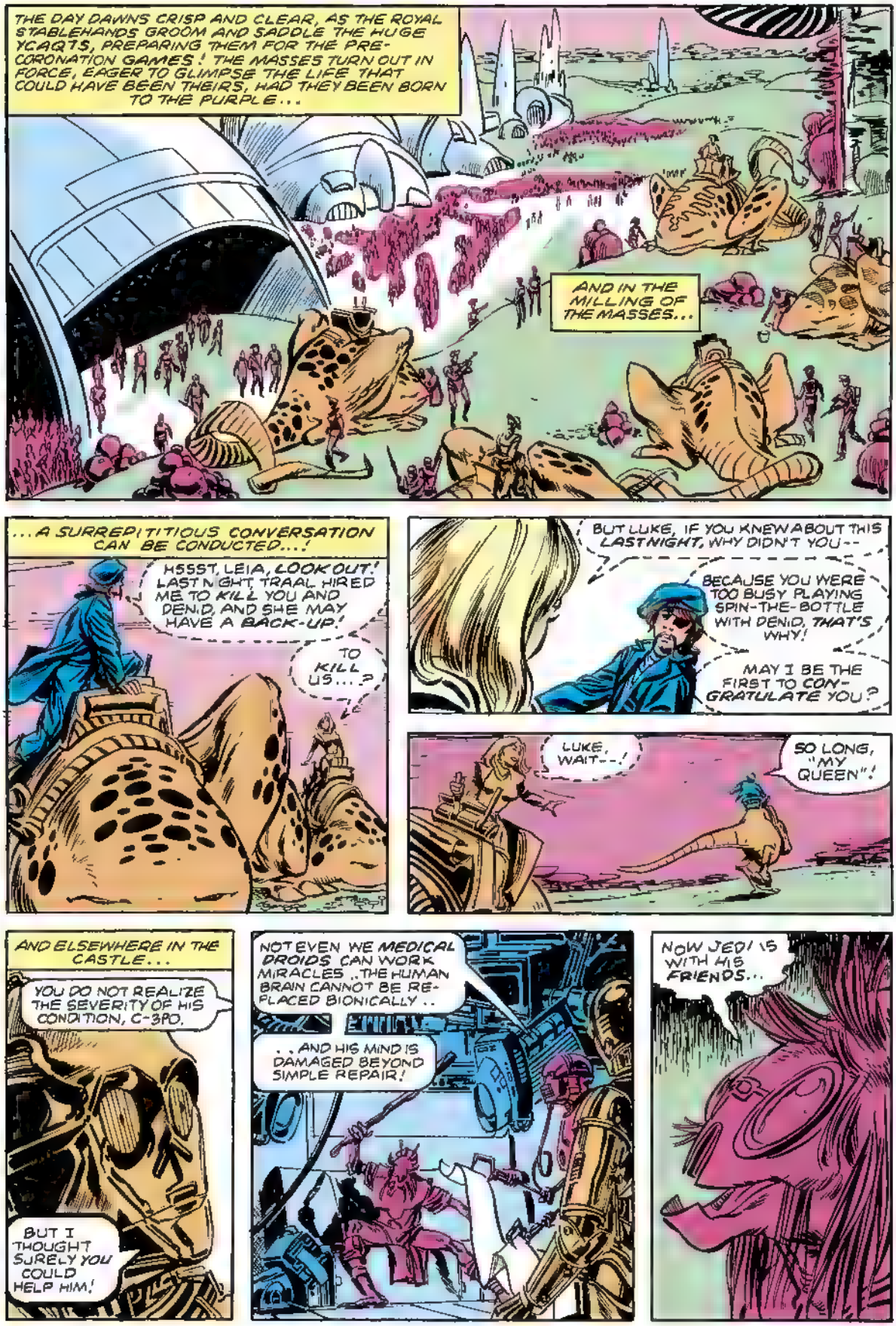

FOOD FOR VICTORIOUS JEDI AND HIS FRIENDS? GOOD...
KEEP THIS CRAZY OLD GUY AWAY FROM ME, WILL YOU, THREEPIO? I'M GONNA HAVE ENOUGH TROUBLE WITHOUT BABY-SITTING HIM!
CERTAINLY, MASTER LU--MASTER KORL!
THE GUESTS OF HONOR ARE SEATED ON A RAISED DIAS, AND THE BANQUET BEGINS!
TO THE MAJORITY OF THE REVELERS, THE GALA EVENT IS AN AFFECTIONATE WELCOME TO THEIR NEWLY-RETURNED PRINCE...
...BUT LUKE SKYWALKER, SEATED BETWEEN A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE EMPIRE, AND THE MAN HE HELPED SNATCH THE CROWN OF VELMOR FROM...
...WONDERS IF HE WOULDN'T BE SAFER FACING ANOTHER DEATH STAR!
AH, FRIEND MARCUS! OUR CUSTOMS DICTATE THAT A MALE NEWCOMER TO OUR PLANET MUST PARTICIPATE IN A SIMPLE CEREMONY BEFORE BREAKING BREAD...
OH?
A TRIVIAL THING, REALLY..
IN OUR ANCIENT PAST, OUTSIDERS DUELED FOR THEIR MEALS!
OF COURSE, NOWADAYS THE CUSTOM IS PURELY CEREMONIAL! WE RARELY FIGHT TO THE DEATH ANYMORE!
LUCKY FOR ME, ZELOR!
LUCKY FOR HIM, TOO! THESE "ENERGY-SWORDS" ARE A LOT LIKE LIGHTSABERS -- I COULD PROBABLY CUT ZELOR INTO BITE-SIZE PIECES WITH THIS...
...BUT I CAN'T LET THEM EVEN SUSPECT THAT I'M REALLY LUKE SKYWALKER! I'LL LET ZELOR WIN!
READY, FRIEND MARCUS?
THEN... BEGIN!
SHHHKK
CRRKKLLL
YEOW! "I'LL LET ZELOR WIN"? THIS GUY'S AN EXPERT!

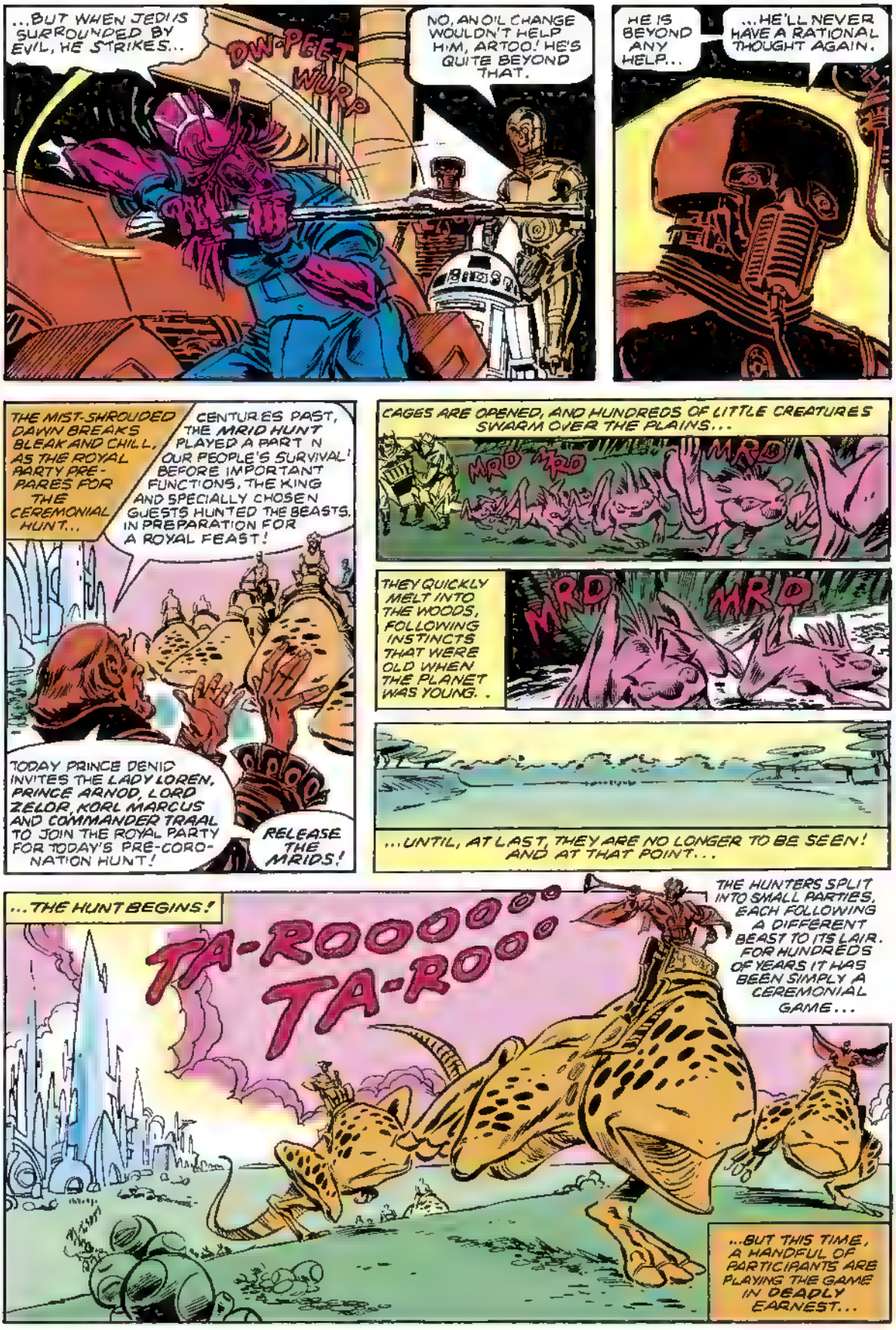
SHRAKK
STILL, I CAN'T GIVE MYSELF AWAY! GOTTA PROTECT MYSELF AS BEST I CAN.
SKOOOM
...AND HOPE THIS IS OVER...
RAKKT
...SOON? HE'S FIGHTING TO THE DEATH! DOES HE KNOW WHO I AM?
LUKE FALLS TO THE FLOOR, AWAITING THE DEATH BLOW...
...BUT THEN...
HAHA
HAHA
HAHAHA
HAHA
HAHA
SO, FRIEND MARCUS! A FORTUNATE THING YOU DIDN'T VISIT HERE IN THE OLDEN DAYS, EH?
UH, THAT'S RIGHT, ZELOR ...HEH, HEH...
NOW THAT THE CEREMONIES ARE OVER, I SHOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE A TOAST...
...TO THE PEOPLE OF VELMOR, WHOSE COUNSEL I SHALL SEEK AND CHERISH THROUGHOUT THE YEARS OF MY REIGN..
...AND ALSO TO MY BETROTHED, THE LADY LOREN...
...WHO, WHEN I ASCEND THE THRONE, I SHALL MAKE MY WIFE, AND YOUR QUEEN!
YAY
WHILE A DUMBFOUNDED LUKE TRIES TO HIDE HIS SHOCK...
LEIA CAN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THIS..
...BUT MAYBE...MAYBE SHE DOES!
AND MAYBE SHE--EH?
THIS REVELRY WILL CONTINUE FOR SOME TIME, MARCUS, MAY I SPEAK TO YOU OUTSIDE...
...ALONE?
?

IN THE MOOD FOR A LITTLE NIGHT AIR, CAPTAIN?
CAN WE DISPENSE WITH THE SMALL TALK, MARCUS? YOU SEE, I KNOW WHO YOU ARE--
--AND WHAT YOU WANT!
Y-YOU DO, DO YOU?
OF COURSE. I'VE RUN A CHECK ON YOUR REGISTRATION PAPERS--AS A PRECAUTION, YOU UNDERSTAND--
--AND NO "KORL MARCUS" EXISTS! YOU'RE TRAVELLING UNDER AN ALIAS--PROBABLY WANTED FOR A CRIME, SOMEWHERE--PERHAPS EVEN CRIMES AGAINST THE EMPIRE!
I SHOULD TURN YOU IN, BUT...
BUT WHAT?
I WANT YOU...
HUH?
...TO KILL PRINCE DENID AND HIS LITTLE QUEEN AT THE CEREMONIAL GAMES TOMORROW! WHATEVER REWARD HE PROMISED YOU FOR RESCUING HIM...
...I'LL DOUBLE IT! I INTEND TO GO FAR IN THE EMPIRE, MARCUS...
...AND I'D BE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR HELP...IN ANY NUMBER OF WAYS!
YOU'VE GOT YOURSELF A DEAL, CAPTAIN!
I THINK WE'RE GOING TO GET ALONG FINE, MARCUS! SEE YOU TOMORROW.
...AND TOMORROW NIGHT!
..AND WHEN LUKE HAS GONE...
YOU CAN COME OUT NOW
DID IT WORK, TRAAL? WILL HE KILL THE PRINCE FOR US?
HE'LL DO IT, ZELOR.
MARCUS WILL KILL DENID AND THAT SIMPERING GIRL...
..THEN WE'LL KILL HIM!
EXCELLENT.

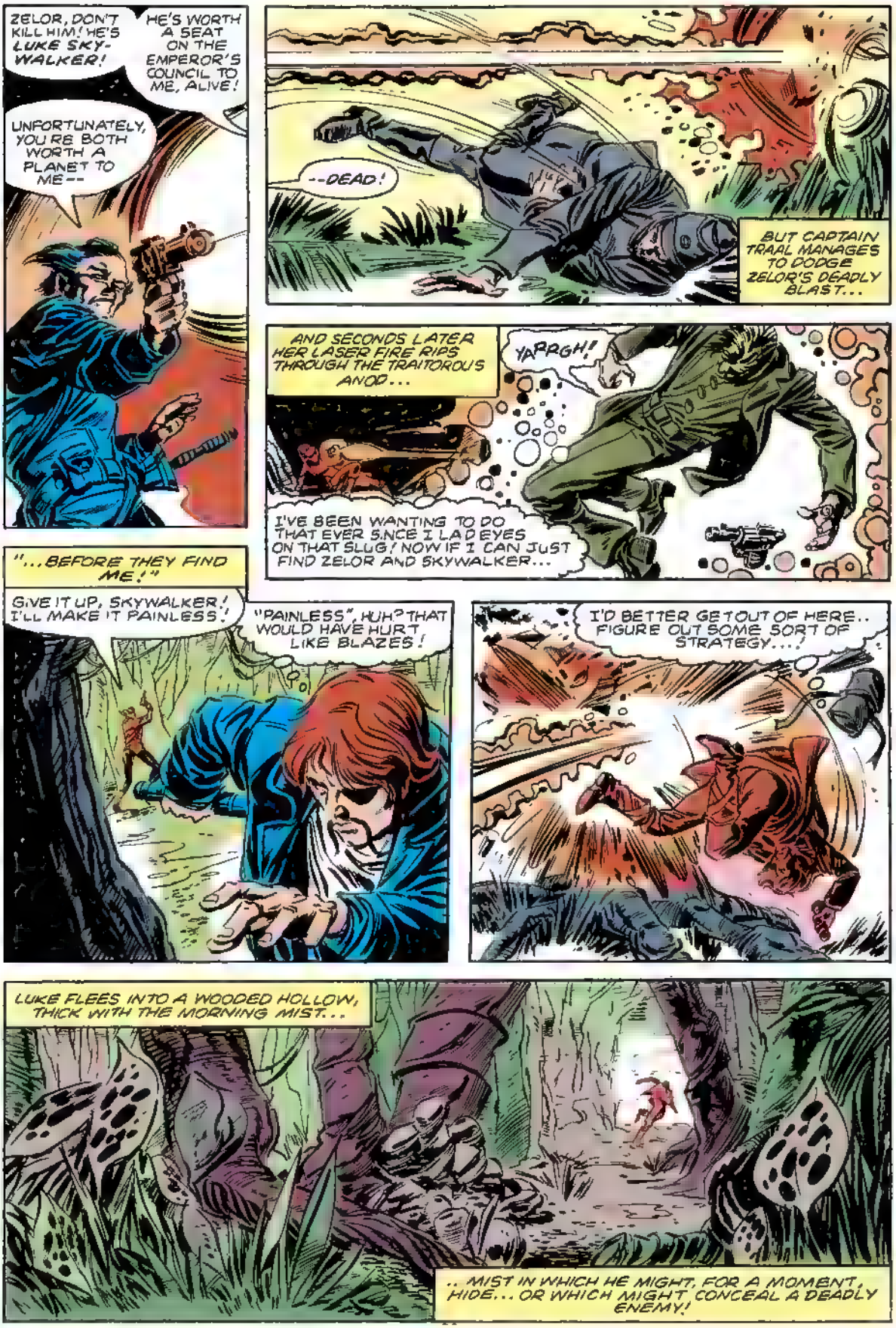

INDEED. I'M AFRAID DENID WOULD HAVE A DISCOURAGING TENDANCY TO REBEL AGAINST THE EMPIRE!
JUST LIKE HIS LATE FATHER, I'M AFRAID! BUT DON'T WORRY, DEAR CAPTAIN, ANOD IS MUCH MORE --TRACTABLE!
HE HAD BETTER BE.
NOW LISTEN, TRAAL, YOU CAN'T THREATEN ME! I'M OF ROYAL BLOOD!
IF THE PEOPLE KNEW HOW YOU TALK ABOUT ME--
--THEY'D CONTINUE TO THINK EXACTLY WHAT I WISH THEM TO THINK, LITTLE BOY!
TELL ANOD NOT TO FORGET WHO PUT HIM IN POWER, ZELOR! THE EMPIRE HAS BEEN WORKING ON THIS SOLAR SYSTEM FOR YEARS. WE WON'T BE PUT OFF BY A "KING" WHO HAS TO BE TOLD WHEN TO SNEEZE!
I ASSURE YOU, CAPTAIN, ANOD AND I ARE MOST APPRECIATIVE OF YOUR EFFORTS.
FORGIVE THE INTERRUPTION, MY REGENT, BUT A TOP-PRIORITY TRANSMISSION AWAITS ON CHANNEL 2!
PIPE IT THROUGH TO MY QUARTERS, CITIZEN.
UNTIL THE MORROW, MY FRIENDS...
AND IN ZELOR'S ROOM...
A THOUSAND PARDONS, MY REGENT! WE TRACED THE SIGNAL AS YOU COMMANDED, BUT ANOTHER SHIP--
I KNOW, YOU BUNGLER! A MERCENARY PILOT FOUND THE PRINCE BEFORE YOU DID! HE'S IN THE PALACE NOW!
YOU WILL RETAIN YOUR LIFE, FOOL, THOUGH YOU ARE REDUCED TWO GRADES IN RANK! TRANSMISSION ENDED!
YLK
AND BY THE TIME HE RETURNS TO VELMOR, NOT ONLY WILL DENID AND HIS BETROTHED BE DEAD.. BUT CAPTAIN TRAAL AND ANOD AS WELL --ALL SLAIN BY MY HAND!
I HAVE RULED VELMOR FOR TWENTY YEARS...AND HAVE NO INTENTION OF RELINQUISHING THE THRONE NOW!
OF COURSE, BOTH THE EMPIRE AND THE PEOPLE WILL WANT A SCAPEGOAT, AS WILL I...AND OUR MERCENARY FRIEND, MARCUS, SEEMS BORN FOR THE PART!


AND IF OUR YOUNG STAR-WARRIOR'S EARS AREN'T BURNING RIGHT NOW, IT MAY BE BECAUSE HE'S SOMEWHAT DISTRACTED...
IT'LL SERVE ME RIGHT IF I BREAK MY NECK, BUT IF CAPTAIN TRAAL SAW "KORL MARCUS" PAYING A MIDNIGHT VISIT TO "LADY LOREN" SHE MIGHT THINK MARCUS WAS TRYING TO WARN LOREN...
...AND SHE'D BE RIGHT!
SECURING THIS PLANET FOR THE REBEL ALLIANCE IS WORTH THE EFFORT! SINCE IT'S THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PLANET IN ITS SOLAR SYSTEM, WHICHEVER SIDE ITS LEADER SUPPORT, ALL THE OTHERS'LL FOLLOW!
WHOOPS, ALMOST TOOK THE FALL! BIONIC RIGHT HAND, I LOVE YOU.
;UMPH! HERE WE ARE! WHILE I'M HERE, MAYBE I SHOULD ASK LEIA ABOUT THAT MARRIAGE ANNOUNCEMENT OF DENID'S, TOO!
NAH, WHY BOTHER? I'M SURE SHE'S AS MUCH IN THE DARK ABOUT IT AS I AM.
THERE'S A LIGHT ON, SHE MUST STILL BE--
OH, NO.
ANNOUNCING OUR "MARRIAGE" WAS IMPULSIVE, LEIA, ESPECIALLY WITHOUT YOUR KNOWLEDGE. IT JUST EXPRESSED A HEARTFELT WISH...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, DENID?
I LOVE YOU, LEIA! MARRY ME, AND RULE WITH ME, AS MY QUEEN!
DENID, I...
HUSH, MY LOVE...
DON'T SAY A WORD!


THE DAY DAWNS CRISP AND CLEAR, AS THE ROYAL STABLEHANDS GROOM AND SADDLE THE HUGE YCAQTS, PREPARING THEM FOR THE PRE-CORONATION GAMES! THE MASSES TURN OUT IN FORCE, EAGER TO GLIMPSE THE LIFE THAT COULD HAVE BEEN THEIRS, HAD THEY BEEN BORN TO THE PURPLE...
AND IN THE MILLING OF THE MASSES...
...A SURREPTITIOUS CONVERSATION CAN BE CONDUCTED...!
HSSST, LEIA, LOOK OUT! LAST NIGHT, TRAAL HIRED ME TO KILL YOU AND DENID, AND SHE MAY HAVE A BACK-UP!
TO KILL US...?
BUT LUKE, IF YOU KNEW ABOUT THIS LAST NIGHT, WHY DIDN'T YOU--
BECAUSE YOU WERE TOO BUSY PLAYING SPIN-THE-BOTTLE WITH DENID, THAT'S WHY!
MAY I BE THE FIRST TO CON-GRATULATE YOU?
LUKE, WAIT--!
SO LONG, "MY QUEEN"!
AND ELSEWHERE IN THE CASTLE...
YOU DO NOT REALIZE THE SEVERITY OF HIS CONDITION, C-3PO.
BUT I THOUGHT SURELY YOU COULD HELP HIM!
NOT EVEN WE MEDICAL DROIDS CAN WORK MIRACLES..THE HUMAN BRAIN CANNOT BE RE-PLACED BIONICALLY..
..AND HIS MIND IS DAMAGED BEYOND SIMPLE REPAIR!
NOW JEDI IS WITH HIS FRIENDS...


...BUT WHEN JEDI IS SURROUNDED BY EVIL, HE STRIKES...
DW-PEET WUP
NO, AN OIL CHANGE WOULDN'T HELP HIM, ARTOO! HE'S QUITE BEYOND THAT.
HE IS BEYOND ANY HELP...
...HE'LL NEVER HAVE A RATIONAL THOUGHT AGAIN.
THE MIST-SHROUDED DAWN BREAKS BLEAK AND CHILL, AS THE ROYAL PARTY PREPARES FOR THE CEREMONIAL HUNT...
CENTURIES PAST, THE MRID HUNT PLAYED A PART IN OUR PEOPLE'S SURVIVAL! BEFORE IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS, THE KING AND SPECIALLY CHOSEN GUESTS HUNTED THE BEASTS, IN PREPARATION FOR A ROYAL FEAST!
TODAY PRINCE DENID INVITES THE LADY LOREN, PRINCE ARNOD, LORD ZELOR, KORL MARCUS AND COMMANDER TRAAL TO JOIN THE ROYAL PARTY FOR TODAY'S PRE-CORONATION HUNT!
RELEASE THE MRIDS!
CAGES ARE OPENED, AND HUNDREDS OF LITTLE CREATURES SWARM OVER THE PLAINS...
MRD
MRD
MRD
THEY QUICKLY MELT INTO THE WOODS, FOLLOWING INSTINCTS THAT WERE OLD WHEN THE PLANET WAS YOUNG..
MRD
MRD
...UNTIL, AT LAST, THEY ARE NO LONGER TO BE SEEN! AND AT THAT POINT...
...THE HUNT BEGINS!
TA-ROOOOOO
TA-ROOO
THE HUNTERS SPLIT INTO SMALL PARTIES, EACH FOLLOWING A DIFFERENT BEAST TO ITS LAIR. FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS IT HAS BEEN SIMPLY A CEREMONIAL GAME...
...BUT THIS TIME, A HANDFUL OF PARTICIPANTS ARE PLAYING THE GAME IN DEADLY EARNEST...

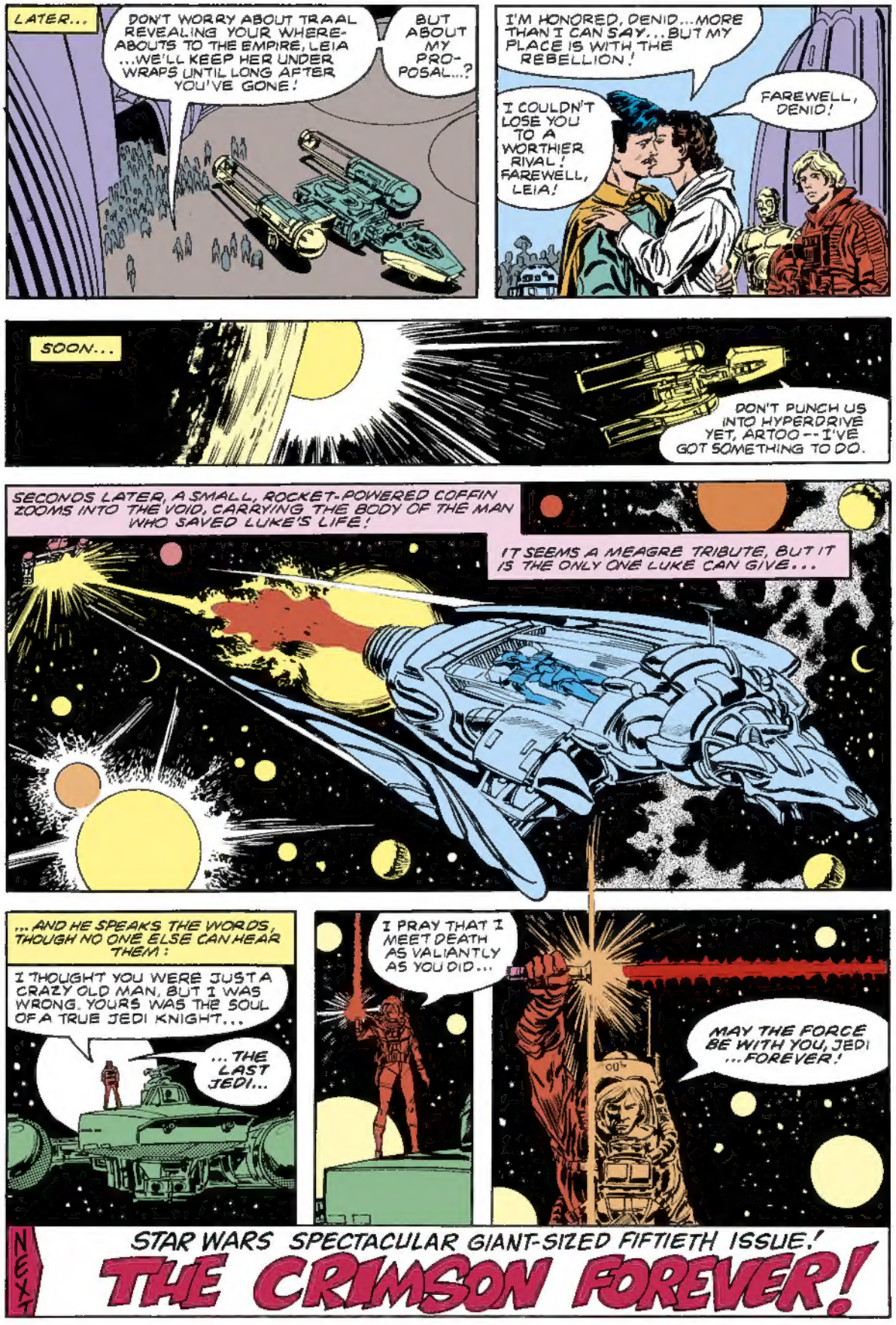
SOME TIME LATER, WHEN THE ROYAL PARTY HAS STOPPED TO REST...
I'D FORGOTTEN HOW BEAUTIFUL MY PLANET CAN BE, LOREN, WITH FOG NESTING IN THE HOLLOWS AND--
DENID, LISTEN VERY CAREFULLY, BUT DON'T LOOK AROUND! WE'RE IN DANGER...
DO IT NOW, MARCUS .. FOR ME...!
ONE MOMENT, CAPTAIN--
--I'D LIKE TO TALK OVER OUR AGREEMENT A BIT MORE--AT MY CONVENIENCE!
WHAT?!
AND THEN...
ZAPTIL
FRIEND MARCUS, ANOD AND I ARE SIMPLY EL'MINATING A FEW... OBSTACLES TO THE THRONE--
MY BLASTER! ZELOR, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
--PRINCE DENID AND HIS LADY! ANOD, KILL THEM!
YES, ZELOR!
ZAPOT
UNNGGGH--
AND YOU'LL DIE NEXT, YOU FOOL!
AND NOW FOR MARCUS... OUR SCAPEGOAT!
YOU CAN'T DODGE FOREVER, MARCUS --GIVE UP!
YOU--YOU KILLED LEIA!?
DROP THAT BLASTER!
CRRRZZL
W-WHAT KIND OF WEAPON IS THAT?
THAT'S A LIGHT-SABER! AND--HE CALLED THE GIRL "LEIA"!
NO, HE CAN'T BE...AND YET, HE MUST BE...!


ZELOR, DON'T KILL HIM! HE'S LUKE SKY-WALKER!
HE'S WORTH A SEAT ON THE EMPEROR'S COUNCIL TO ME, ALIVE!
UNFORTUNATELY, YOU'RE BOTH WORTH A PLANET TO ME--
--DEAD!
BUT CAPTAIN TRAAL MANAGES TO DODGE ZELOR'S DEADLY BLAST...
AND SECONDS LATER HER LASER FIRE RIPS THROUGH THE TRAITOROUS ANOD...
YARRGH!
I'VE BEEN WANTING TO DO THAT EVER SINCE I LAID EYES ON THAT SLUG! NOW IF I CAN JUST FIND ZELOR AND SKYWALKER...
"...BEFORE THEY FIND ME!"
GIVE IT UP, SKYWALKER! I'LL MAKE IT PAINLESS!
"PAINLESS", HUH? THAT WOULD HAVE HURT LIKE BLAZES!
I'D BETTER GET OUT OF HERE.. FIGURE OUT SOME SORT OF STRATEGY...!
LUKE FLEES INTO A WOODED HOLLOW, THICK WITH THE MORNING MIST...
.. MIST IN WHICH HE MIGHT, FOR A MOMENT, HIDE... OR WHICH MIGHT CONCEAL A DEADLY ENEMY!

ZELOR AND TRAAL SEEM TO HAVE DISSOLVED THEIR "PARTNERSHIP", BUT BOTH ARE STILL AFTER ME!
AND WHAT ABOUT LEIA? IF SHE'S NOT DEAD, SHE NEEDS HELP! BUT THE INSTANT I SHOW MYSELF...
"... THEY HAVE A PERFECT TARGET!
"BESIDES BOTH TRAAL AND ZELOR KNOW THE TERRAIN--
"I DON'T.
"THEY BOTH HAVE BLASTERS--
"I DON'T."
BUT I HAVE SOMETHING GOING FOR ME THEY DON'T...
...THE BEST ALLY IN THE UNIVERSE...
"... THE FORCE!"
AND THE YOUNG MAN CLEARS HIS MIND, AND REACHES DEEP INTO HIS SOUL, TO CALM HIMSELF, TO GIVE HIMSELF KNOWLEDGE OF HIS ENEMIES WHEREABOUTS...
AND AT THAT INSTANT, AT THE CASTLE, MILES AWAY...
YES, THIS PLACE PLEASES JEDI, IT IS FULL OF BEAUTY...
...IT--
WHAT? THE YOUNG ONE --HE IS IN DANGER!
I MUST HELP HIM!
BUT-- MASTER JED... SIR...
YOU MUST COME BACK! WE'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR--
--YOU?
WHEET DA-VOOT
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, "I'M IN TROUBLE", ARTOO? MASTER LUKE PUT US BOTH IN CHARGE!
OH, HE'S GOING TO BE VERY ANGRY... VERY ANGRY INDEED!

MEANWHILE...
THERE IS SKYWALKER, AND HE DOESN'T SEEM TO HEAR ME!
I COULD SIMPLY BLAST HIM...
...BUT I MUCH PREFER THE IRONY OF RUNNING HIM THROUGH WITH MY ENERGY-SWORD!
GOODBYE, SKYWALKER!
THE ENERGY-SWORD BEGINS ITS DOWN-WARD KILLING STROKE..
WHEN, AT THE LAST SECOND...
NO!
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! NO ONE COULD PARRY THAT BLOW!
CRRIZZ
JUST BE GLAD I'M ONLY TAKING YOUR SWORD, ZELOR--
--AND NOT YOUR LIFE!
UNNNGH!
BUT UNKNOWN TO LUKE...
I WANT SOME ANSWERS, ZELOR...
HE DOESN'T SEE ME...
...I CAN STUN HIM, KILL ZELOR...
...AND BE OFF THIS PLANET WITH SKYWALKER BEFORE THE LOCALS...
NO! YOU WILL NOT TAKE HIM!
WHO--?!

NOOO
--URRRRK...
THERE IS A BURST FROM TRAAL'S BLASTER, THEN, IN A TWINKLING, IT IS OVER...
...AND SILENCE REIGNS...
J-JEDI, HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF, FOR ME--!
KEEP WATCHING HER, SKY-WALKER...
...AND I'LL--
I RARELY FIGHT TO THE DEATH EITHER, ZELOR...
...BUT IN YOUR CASE, I'D MAKE AN EXCEPTION!
CRRZ
YARRGHHH!
HE STILL DOESN'T SEE ME! IF I CAN ONLY REACH...
SORRY, CAPTAIN-- BUT IT'S OVER!
WHUD
...SOMEHOW, THIS VALIANT OLD MAN FOUND THE STRENGTH AND THE WITS TO SAVE MY LIFE... BUT LOST HIS...
...HE DID THAT FOR ME...THOUGH I SCORNED HIM AND DERIDED HIM IN MY HEART! HE LOST HIS LIFE, AND I LOST HIM!
EXCUSE ME...WE LOSERS WOULD LIKE TO BE ALONE!
D-DENID? WHAT HAPPENED?
ANOD TRIED TO KILL US, LEIA...BUT HE MUST HAVE SET HIS BLASTER ON STUN! POOR ANOD...HE WAS ALWAYS THE LOSER!
HE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE, PRINCE...


LATER...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT TRAAL REVEALING YOUR WHEREABOUTS TO THE EMPIRE, LEIA ...WE'LL KEEP HER UNDER WRAPS UNTIL LONG AFTER YOU'VE GONE!
BUT ABOUT MY PROPOSAL...?
I'M HONORED, DENID...MORE THAN I CAN SAY...BUT MY PLACE IS WITH THE REBELLION!
FAREWELL, DENID!
I COULDN'T LOSE YOU TO A WORTHIER RIVAL! FAREWELL, LEIA!
SOON...
DON'T PUNCH US INTO HYPERDRIVE YET, ARTOO--I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO DO.
SECONDS LATER, A SMALL, ROCKET-POWERED COFFIN ZOOMS INTO THE VOID, CARRYING THE BODY OF THE MAN WHO SAVED LUKE'S LIFE!
IT SEEMS A MEAGRE TRIBUTE, BUT IT IS THE ONLY ONE LUKE CAN GIVE...
...AND HE SPEAKS THE WORDS, THOUGH NO ONE ELSE CAN HEAR THEM:
I THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST A CRAZY OLD MAN, BUT I WAS WRONG. YOURS WAS THE SOUL OF A TRUE JEDI KNIGHT...
...THE LAST JEDI...
I PRAY THAT I MEET DEATH AS VALIANTLY AS YOU DID...
MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU, JEDI ...FOREVER!
NEXT
STAR WARS SPECTACULAR GIANT-SIZED FIFTIETH ISSUE!
THE CRIMSON FOREVER!

STAR WARS®

OMNIBUS

A LONG TIME AGO. . . .

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. . . .

Farm boy Luke Skywalker dreamed of going to the stars, only to get more than he ever hoped for when he joined an old Jedi to rescue a princess, aided a galactic rebellion, and singlehandedly destroyed the deadliest super-weapon ever devised. But Luke's adventures in the film *Star Wars: A New Hope* were just the beginning. From 1977 to 1986, Marvel Comics published monthly adventures in comics form, keeping alive the excitement and fun of Star Wars for a whole generation as they waited for the next chapter in the film series.

Collected here are issues #28 through #49, and the Giant-Size Annual #1, of the Marvel Comics *Star Wars* series from the 1970s—including the comics adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back*.

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